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The earliest lives of Dante

YALE STUDIES IN ENGLISH

ALBERT S. COOK, EDITOR

X

THE EARLIEST LIVES OF DANTE

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN OF

Giovanni Boccaccio and Lionardo Bruni Aretino

BY

JAMES ROBINSON SMITH

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TO

ROBERT KILBURN ROOT

IN FRIENDSHIP AND A COMMON FAITH

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PREFACE

These lives of Dante were written, one within fifty, the other within a hundred and twenty-five years, after the poet's death. Boccaccio was acquainted with at least four persons who, as we have reason to believe, knew Dante in the flesh, and he could draw his information from them as well as from popular tradition. Bruni, on the other hand, who, as he himself says, supplements the work of his predecessor, derives the bulk of his matter from public documents and letters of Dante, which are not now extant. The value, then, of their works lies in their nearness to authoritative sources. No other documents of anything like equal importance as regards the life of Dante have come down to us. Our knowledge of the poet as he moved among men is almost wholly derived from these two lives and from his own works.

The facts here presented are not all of equal significance or trustworthiness. The dream of the poet's mother, the presumed unhappiness of his marriage, the charge made against him of great licentiousness in youth and manhood, the dates here given of his works, the loss and recovery of the last thirteen cantos of the *Commedia*, have no evidence in their favor other than that which is here presented. But the main features of his life: the time and place of his birth, his liberal education, his life-long love of Beatrice on earth and in the spirit, his marriage to Gemma Donati, his rise to the highest places in the government of Florence, his banishment and twenty years of exile, and the date and manner of his death, these things, I repeat, we know to be true.

And what a series of pictures it is! student, lover, poet, the companion of musicians and singers; the soldier, the

father of a family, great in the affairs of his country at home and abroad; the exile, the wanderer, the greater poet; oppressed by poverty, defeated in his attempts to deliver the fatherland, heavy with a sense of the sin and injustice of the world, and feeling, as his great poem tells us, his own imperfect living toward his perfect aim, and yet through it all knowing the peace that comes with consecration to one's dreams.

Professor Albert S. Cook of Yale University suggested the undertaking of the present translation. The work has been carried on under his helpful guidance, and every page is nearer what it should be because of his thoughtful and painstaking criticism. Professor Henry R. Lang, also of Yale, has kindly decided for me doubtful points in the Italian. For the rendering of certain words and phrases I am indebted to the translation of the Boccaccio life by Professor G. R. Carpenter, published in a limited edition by the Grolier Club, New York 1900; and to the translation of the Bruni life and of portions of the Boccaccio life by Mr. P. H. Wicksteed, Hull 1898.

The texts used are as follows: Boccaccio, *La Vita di Dante*, ed. by Macrì-Leone, Florence 1888; Bruni, *La Vita di Dante*, in vol. v of Lombardi's edition of the *Divina Commedia*, Padua 1822; F. Villani's *Liber de Civitatis Florentiae Famosis Civibus*, ed. by Galetti, Florence 1847. In a very few instances I have departed from these texts: for example, I read in the *Vita di Dante* by Boccaccio, p. 25, l. 7, *cercante* for *cercanti;* p. 80, l. 5, *lei* for *lui;* in the Latin life by Villani, *singillatim* for *sugillandum.* I have retained the spelling of the texts in the case of proper names.

A discussion of the genuineness of the *Vita* by Boccaccio, which is here translated, as opposed to the so-called *Compendio*, and a critical review of both the Bruni and Boccaccio lives, will be found in *Dante and His Early Biographers*, by Dr. Edward Moore, London 1890.

J. R. S.

Yale University, May, 1901.

THE LIFE OF DANTE

BY

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

(1313–1375)

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I

PROEM

Solon, whose bosom was reputed a human temple of divine wisdom, and whose sacred laws are manifest proof to modern men of ancient justice, used frequently to say, as some relate, that all republics, like men, walk and stand on two feet. With sound judgment he declared the right foot to be the punishment of every crime, and the left the remuneration of every virtuous deed. He added that if either of these two things through carelessness or corruption be neglected, the republic that so acts must unquestionably walk lame; and that if she should be so unfortunate as to sin against both these canons, almost certainly she could not stand at all. Moved, then, by this commendable and obviously true precept, many ancient and illustrious peoples did honor to their men of worth, sometimes by deification, again by a marble statue, often by splendid obsequies, now by an arch of triumph, and now by a laurel crown, according to the merits of their lives. The punishments, on the other hand, that were meted to the culpable, I do not care to rehearse.

By virtue of these honors and corrections, Assyria, Macedonia, Greece, and finally the Roman Republic expanded, reaching with their deeds the ends of the earth and with their fame touching the stars. But their modern successors, and especially my Florentines, have not only followed feebly in the footsteps of these noble exemplars, but have so far departed therefrom that ambition usurps all

the rewards of virtue. Wherefore it is with the greatest affliction of mind that I, and whoever else views it with the eye of reason, see evil and perverse men raised to high places, to the chief offices and rewards, and good men banished, depreciated, and debased. What end the judgment of God reserves for such action, let them consider who hold the helm of this vessel, for we of the humbler throng are borne on the wave of fortune, and are not partakers in their guilt.

Although what has been said above could be verified by countless cases of ingratitude, and by instances of shameless indulgence plain to all, it will suffice for me to instance one case alone, in order that I may the less expose our faults, and that I may come to my principal purpose. Nor is the case in point an ordinary or slight one, for I am going to record the banishment of that most illustrious man, Dante Alighieri, an ancient citizen and born of no mean parents, who merited as much through his virtue, learning, and good services as is adequately shown and will be shown by the deeds he wrought. If such deeds had been done in a just republic, we believe they would have earned for him the highest rewards.

O iniquitous design! O shameless deed! O wretched example, clear proof of ruin to come! Instead of these rewards there was meted to him an unjust and bitter condemnation, perpetual banishment with alienation of his paternal goods, and, could it have been effected, the profanation of his glorious renown by false charges. The recent traces of his flight, his bones buried in an alien land, and his children scattered in the houses of others, still in part bear witness to these things. If all the other iniquities of Florence could be hidden from the all-seeing eyes of God, should not this one suffice to provoke his wrath upon her? Yea, in truth. Of him who, on the other hand, may be exalted, I deem it fitting to be silent.

Indeed, the close observer sees that the modern world has not only departed from the pathway of the former world,

whereon I touched above, but that it has turned its feet in quite the opposite direction. Wherefore it seems manifest that if we and others who live contrary to the above-cited maxim of Solon remain on our feet without falling, the reason must be that the nature of things has changed, as we often notice, through long operation, or that God unexpectedly and miraculously sustains us through the merits of some action of our past; or else, perchance, his patience awaits our repentance. If this in due time does not follow, let none doubt that his wrath, which with slow pace moves to vengeance, reserves for us treatment so much the more grievous as fully to compensate for his delay.

But inasmuch as we should not only flee evil deeds, albeit they seem to go unpunished, but also by right action should strive to amend them, I, although not fitted for so great a task, will try to do according to my little talent what the city should have done with magnificence, but has not. For I recognize that I am a part, though a small one, of that same city whereof Dante Alighieri, if his merits, his nobleness, and his virtue be considered, was a very great part, and that for this reason I, like every other citizen, am personally responsible for the honors due him. Not with a statue shall I honor him, nor with splendid obsequies—which customs no longer hold among us, nor would my powers suffice therefor—but with words I shall honor him, feeble though they be for so great an undertaking. Of these I have, and of these will I give, that other nations may not say that his native land, both as a whole and in part, has been equally ungrateful to so great a poet.

And I shall write in a style full light and humble, for higher my art does not permit me; and in the Florentine idiom, that it may not differ from that which Dante used in the greater part of his writings. I shall first record those things about which he himself preserved a modest silence, namely the nobleness of his birth, his life, his studies, and his habits. Afterwards I shall gather under one head the works he composed, whereby he has rendered

himself so evident to posterity that perchance my words will throw as much darkness upon him as light, albeit this is neither my intention nor wish. For I am content always to be set right, here and elsewhere, by those wiser than I, in all that I have spoken mistakenly. And that I may not err, I humbly pray that He who, as we know, drew Dante to his vision by a stair so lofty, will now aid and guide my spirit and my feeble hand.

II

DANTE'S BIRTH AND STUDIES

Florence, the noblest of Italian cities, had her beginning, as ancient history and the general opinion of the present time seem to declare, from the Romans. Increasing in size as years went on, and filled with people and famous men, she began to appear to all her neighbors not only as a city but a power. What the cause of change was from these great beginnings—whether adverse fortune, or unfavorable skies, or the deserts of her citizens—we cannot be sure. But certain it is that, not many centuries later, Attila, that most cruel King of the Vandals, and general spoiler of nearly all Italy, after he had slain or dispersed all or the greater part of the citizens that were known for their noble blood or for some other distinction, reduced the city to ashes and ruins.

In this condition it is thought to have remained for more than three hundred years. At the end of that period, the Roman Empire having been transferred, and not without cause, from Greece to Gaul, Charles the Great, then the most clement King of the French, was raised to the imperial throne. At the close of many labors, moved, as I believe, by the Divine Spirit, he turned his imperial mind to the rebuilding of the desolated city. He it was who caused it to be rebuilt and inhabited by members of the same families from which the original founders were drawn, making it as far as possible like to Rome. And although he reduced the circumference of the walls, he nevertheless gathered within them the few descendants of the ancient fugitives.

Now among the new inhabitants (perhaps, as fame attests,

the director of the rebuilding, allotter of the houses and streets, and giver of wise laws to the new people) was one who came from Rome, a most noble youth of the house of the Frangipani, whom everybody called Eliseo. When he had finished the main work for which he had come, he became, either from love of the city newly laid out by him, or from the pleasantness of the site, to which he perceived perhaps that the skies were in the future to be propitious, or drawn on by whatever other cause, a permanent citizen there. And the family of children and descendants, not small, nor little to be praised, which he left behind him, abandoned the ancient surname of their ancestors, and took in its stead the name of their founder in Florence, and all called themselves the Elisei.

Among the other members of this family, as time went on and son descended from father, there was born and there lived a knight by the name of Cacciaguida, in arms and in judgment excellent and brave. In his youth his elders gave him for a bride a maiden born of the Aldighieri of Ferrara, prized for her beauty and her character, no less than for her noble blood. They lived together many years, and had several children. Whatever the others may have been called, in one of the children it pleased the mother to renew the name of her ancestors—as women often are fond of doing—and so she called him Aldighieri, although the word later, corrupted by the dropping of the 'd,' survived as Alighieri. The excellence of this man caused his descendants to relinquish the title Elisei, and take as their patronymic Alighieri; which name holds to this day. From him were descended many children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; and, during the reign of Emperor Frederick II, an Alighieri was born who was destined, more through his son than of himself, to become famous. His wife in her pregnancy, and near the time of her delivery, saw in a dream what the fruit of her womb was to be; although the matter was not then understood by her nor by any other, and only from that which followed is to-day manifest to all.

This gentle lady seemed in her dream to be beneath a lofty laurel tree, in a green meadow, beside a clear spring, and there she felt herself delivered of a son. And he, partaking merely of the berries that fell from the laurel and of the waters of the clear spring, seemed almost immediately to become a shepherd that strove with all his power to secure some leaves of the tree whose fruit had nourished him. And as he strove she thought he fell, and when he rose again she perceived that he was no longer a man but a peacock; whereat so great wonder seized her that her sleep broke. Not long after it befell that the due time for her labor arrived, and she brought forth a son whom she and his father by common consent named Dante; and rightly so, for as will be seen as we proceed, the issue corresponded exactly to the name.

This was that Dante of whom the present discourse treats. This was that Dante given to our age by the special grace of God. This was that Dante who was the first to open the way for the return of the Muses, banished from Italy. By him the glory of the Florentine idiom has been made manifest; by him all the beauties of the vulgar tongue have been set to fitting numbers; by him dead poesy may truly be said to have been revived. A due consideration of these things will show that he could rightly have had no other name than Dante.

This special glory of Italy was born in our city in the year of the saving incarnation of the King of the universe 1265, when the Roman Empire was without a ruler owing to the death of the aforesaid Frederick, and Pope Urban the Fourth was sitting in the chair of Saint Peter. The family into which he was born was of a smiling fortune —smiling, I mean, if we consider the condition of the world that then obtained. I will omit all consideration of his infancy—whatever it may have been—wherein appeared many signs of the coming glory of his genius. But I will note that from his earliest boyhood, having already learned the rudiments of letters, he gave himself and all his time,

not to youthful lust and indolence, after the fashion of the nobles of to-day, lolling at ease in the lap of his mother, but to continued study, in his native city, of the liberal arts, so that he became exceedingly expert therein. And as his mind and genius ripened with his years, he devoted himself, not to lucrative pursuits, whereto every one in general now hastens, but, with a laudable desire for perpetual fame, scorning transitory riches, he freely dedicated himself to the acquisition of a complete knowledge of poetic creations and of their exposition by rules of art. In this exercise he became closely intimate with Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Statius, and with every other famous poet. And not only did he delight to know them, but he strove to imitate them in lofty song, even as his works demonstrate, whereof we shall speak at the proper time.

He perceived that poetical creations are not vain and simple fables or marvels, as many blockheads suppose, but that beneath them are hid the sweetest fruits of historical and philosophical truth, so that the conceptions of the poets cannot be fully understood without history and moral and natural philosophy. Proportionately distributing his time, he therefore strove to master history by himself, and philosophy under divers teachers, though not without long study and toil. And, possessed by the sweetness of knowing the truth of the things shut up by Heaven, and finding naught else in life more dear than this, he utterly abandoned all other temporal cares, and devoted himself wholly to this alone. And to the end that no region of philosophy should remain unvisited by him, he penetrated with acute genius into the profoundest depths of theology. Nor was the result far distant from the aim. Unmindful of heat and cold, vigils and fasts, and every other physical hardship, by assiduous study he grew to such knowledge of the Divine Essence and of the other Separate Intelligences as can be compassed here by the human intellect. And as by application various sciences were learned by him at various periods, so he mastered them in various studies under various teachers.

The first rudiments of knowledge, as stated above, he received in his native city. Thence he went to Bologna, as to a place richer in such food. And, when verging on old age, he went to Paris, where in many disputations he displayed the loftiness of his genius with so great glory to himself that his auditors still marvel when they speak thereof. For studies so many and so excellent he deservedly won the highest titles, and while he lived some ever called him poet, others philosopher, and many theologian. But since the victory is more glorious to the victor, the greater the might of the vanquished, I deem it fitting to make known from how surging and tempestuous a sea, buffeted now this way, now that, triumphant alike over waves and opposing winds, he won the blessed haven of the glorious titles aforenamed.

III

DANTE'S LOVE FOR BEATRICE, AND HIS MARRIAGE

Studies in general, and speculative studies in particular—to which, as has been shown, our Dante wholly applied himself—usually demand solitude, remoteness from care, and tranquility of mind. Instead of this retirement and quiet, Dante had, almost from the beginning of his life down to the day of his death, a violent and insufferable passion of love, a wife, domestic and public cares, exile, and poverty, not to mention those more particular cares which these necessarily involve. The former I deem it fitting to explain in detail, in order that their burden may appear the greater.

In that season wherein the sweetness of heaven reclothes the earth with all its adornments, and makes her all smiling with varied flowers scattered among green leaves, the custom obtained in our city that men and women should keep festival in different gatherings, each person in his neighborhood. And so it chanced that among others Folco Portinari, a man held in great esteem among his fellow-citizens, on the first day of May gathered his neighbors in his house for a feast. Now among these came the aforementioned Alighieri, followed by Dante, who was still in his ninth year; for little children are wont to follow their fathers, especially to places of festival. And mingling here in the house of the feast-giver with others of his own age, of whom there were many, both boys and girls, when the first tables had been served he boyishly entered with the others into the games, so far as his tender age permitted.

Now amid the throng of children was a little daughter of the aforesaid Folco, whose name was Bice, though he always called her by her full name, Beatrice. She was, it may be, eight years old, very graceful for her age, full gentle and pleasing in her actions, and much more serious and modest in her words and ways than her few years required. Her features were most delicate and perfectly proportioned, and, in addition to their beauty, full of such pure loveliness that many thought her almost a little angel. She, then, such as I picture her, or it may be far more beautiful, appeared at this feast to the eyes of our Dante; not, I suppose, for the first time, but for the first time with power to inspire him with love. And he, though still a child, received the lovely image of her into his heart with so great affection that it never left him from that day forward so long as he lived.

Now just what this affection was no one knows, but certainly it is true that Dante at an early age became a most ardent servitor of love. It may have been a harmony of temperaments or of characters, or a special influence of heaven that worked thereto, or that which we know is experienced at festivals, where because of the sweetness of the music, the general happiness, and the delicacy of the dishes and wines, the minds, not only of youths but even of mature men, expand and are prone to be caught readily by whatever pleases them. But passing over the accidents of youth, I say that the flames of love multiplied with years in such measure that naught else gave him gladness, or comfort, or peace, save the sight of Beatrice. Forsaking, therefore, all other matters, with the utmost solicitude he went wherever he thought he might see her, as if he were to attain from her face and her eyes all his happiness and complete consolation.

O insensate judgment of lovers! who but they would think to check the flames by adding to the fuel? Dante himself in his *Vita Nuova* in part makes known how many and of what nature were the thoughts, the sighs, the tears,

and the other grievous passions that he later suffered by reason of this love, wherefore I do not care to rehearse them more in detail. This much alone I do not wish to pass over without mention, namely, that according as he himself writes, and as others to whom his passion was known bear witness, this love was most virtuous, nor did there ever appear by look or word or sign any sensual appetite either in the lover or in the thing beloved; no little marvel to the present world, from which all innocent pleasure has so fled, and which is so accustomed to have the thing that pleases it conform to its lust before it has concluded to love it, that he who loves otherwise has become a miracle, even as a thing most rare.

If such love for so long season could interrupt his eating, his sleep, and every quietness, how great an enemy must we think it to have been to his sacred studies and to his genius? Certainly no mean one, although many maintain that it urged his genius on, and argue for proof from his graceful rimed compositions in the Florentine idiom, written in praise of his beloved and for the expression of his ardors and amorous conceits. But truly I should not agree with this, unless I first admitted that ornate writing is the most essential part of every science—which is not true.

As every one may plainly perceive, there is nothing stable in this world, and, if anything is subject to change, it is our life. A trifle too much cold or heat within us, not to mention countless other accidents and possibilities, easily leads us from existence to non-existence. Nor is gentle birth privileged against this, nor riches, nor youth, nor any other worldly dignity. Dante must needs experience the force of this general law by another's death before he did by his own. The most beautiful Beatrice was near the end of her twenty-fourth year when, as it pleased Him who governs all things, she left the sufferings of this world, and passed to the glory that her virtues had prepared for her. By her departure Dante was thrown into such sorrow, such grief and tears, that many of those nearest him, both relatives and friends, believed that death alone would end

them. They expected that this would shortly come to pass, seeing that he gave no ear to the comfort and consolation offered him. The days were like the nights, and the nights like the days. Not an hour of them passed without groans, and sighs, and an abundant quantity of tears. His eyes seemed two copious springs of welling water, so that most men wondered whence he received moisture enough for his weeping.

But even as we see that sufferings through long experience become easy to bear, and that similarly all things in time diminish and cease, so it came to pass that in the course of several months Dante seemed to remember without weeping that Beatrice was dead. And with truer judgment, as grief somewhat gave place to reason, he came to recognize that neither weeping, nor sighs, nor aught else could restore his lost lady to him, wherefore he prepared to sustain the loss of her presence with greater patience. Nor was it long, now that the tears had ceased, before the sighs, which were already near their end, began in great measure to depart without returning.

Through weeping and the pain that his heart felt within, and through lack of any care of himself, he had become outwardly almost a savage thing to look upon—lean, unshaven, and almost utterly transformed from that which he was wont to be formerly; so that his aspect moved to pity not only his acquaintances but all others who saw him, although he let himself be seen but little by any one save his friends while this so tearful state endured. Their compassion and fear of worse to come made his relatives attentive to his comfort. And when they saw that his tears had somewhat ceased, and knew that the burning sighs gave a little respite to his troubled bosom, they began again to solicit the broken-hearted one with consolations that had long been unheeded. And though up to that hour he had obstinately closed his ears to every one, he now began not only to open them somewhat, but willingly to listen to that which was said for his comfort.

When his relatives perceived this, to the end that they might not only completely draw him from his sorrow but might also restore him to happiness, they took counsel together to give him a wife. They thought that as the lost lady had been the cause of sadness, so the newly acquired one might be the occasion of joy. And having found a young girl who was suited to his condition, they unfolded their purpose to Dante, employing those arguments that seemed to them most convincing. Not to touch particularly on each point, after a long and continued struggle, the natural result followed their reasoning with him, and he was married.

O blind intellects! O darkened understandings! O vain reasoning of mortal men! how frequently are results contrary to your opinions, and for the most part not without cause! What man under pretense of the excessive heat would lead one from the soft air of Italy to the burning sands of Libya in order that he might cool himself, or from the island of Cyprus to the eternal shades of the Rhodopean Mountains in order that he might be warmed? What physician would strive to expel an acute fever by means of fire, or a chill from the marrow of the bones with ice or snow? Surely none save he who thinks to assuage the sorrows of love by means of a new bride. They who hope to do this do not know the nature of love, nor how it adds every other passion to its own. In vain is aid or counsel brought against its power, if once it has taken firm root in the heart of him who has long loved. Even as in the first stages every little resistance avails, so in its later growth the greater checks are frequently wont to work harm. But we must return to our subject, and concede for the moment that there may be things that in themselves can make one forget the troubles of love.

What, in truth, will he have done who, in order to free me from one trying thought, plunges me into a thousand more grievous still? Truly naught else, save that by adding to my ill he will make me wish to return to that from which he drew me. We see this happen to most of those who,

in order to escape from or be relieved of troubles, blindly marry, or are married by others. They do not perceive that, though clear of one perplexity, they have entered into a thousand, until experience proves it to them when they are no longer able, though repentant, to turn back. His relatives and friends gave Dante a wife, that his tears for Beatrice might cease. I do not know that, as a result of this—although his tears passed away, or rather, perhaps, had already departed—the flame of love also passed away, and indeed I do not believe that such was the case. But, granting that it was extinguished, many fresh and more grievous trials might befall.

Accustomed to pursue his sacred studies far into the night, as often as was his pleasure he discoursed with kings, emperors, and other most exalted princes, disputed with philosophers, and delighted in the most agreeable of poets; and, through listening to the sufferings of others, he allayed his own. But now he is bound to withdraw from this illustrious company whenever his new lady wishes him to listen to the talk of such women as she chooses, with whom he must not only agree against his pleasure, but whom he must praise, if he would not add to his troubles. It had been his custom, whenever the vulgar crowd wearied him, to retire to some solitary spot, and there in speculation to discover what spirit moves the heavens, whence comes life to animals, what are the causes of things; to forecast strange inventions or compose something that should make him live after death among future generations. But now not only is he drawn from these sweet contemplations as often as it pleases his new lady, but he must consort with company ill fitted for such things. He who was free to laugh or weep, to sigh or sing, as sweet or bitter passions moved him, now does not dare, for he must needs give account to his lady, not only of greater things, but even of every little sigh, explaining what produced it, whence it came, and whither it went. For she takes his light-heartedness as evidence of love for another, and his sadness, of hatred for herself.

O the incalculable weariness of having to live and converse, and finally to grow old and die, with so suspicious a creature! I prefer to pass over the new and heavy cares which the unwonted must bear, especially in our city; namely, the provision of clothes, ornaments, and roomfuls of needless trifles, which women make themselves believe are necessary to proper living; the provision of men-servants, maid-servants, nurses, and chambermaids; the furnishing of banquets, gifts, and presents, which must be made to the bride's relatives, since husbands wish that their wives should think they love these persons. Moreover, there are many other things that free men never knew before. And I now come to things that cannot be evaded.

Who doubts that the judgment of the people concerns itself with one's wife, as to whether she be fair or no? And if she be reputed beautiful, who doubts that she straightway will have many admirers, who will importunately besiege her fickle mind, one with his good looks, another with his noble birth, this one with marvelous flattery, that one with presents, and still another with his pleasing ways? What is desired by many is hardly defended from every one, and the purity of women need be overthrown but once to make themselves infamous and their husbands for ever miserable. And if, through the ill-luck of him who leads her home, she be not fair, inasmuch as we frequently see the most beautiful women soon become tiresome, what may we think with regard to these plain women, save that not only they themselves, but every place where they may be found, will be held in hatred by those who must always have them for their own? Hence arises their wrath. Nor is any brute more cruel than an angry woman, nay, nor so cruel. No man can feel safe who commits himself to one who thinks she has reason to be wroth. And they all think that.

What shall I say of their ways? If I were to show how and to how great an extent wives run counter to the peace and repose of men, I should stretch my discourse too far. It therefore suffices to speak of one thing alone, common to

nearly all women. They reflect that good conduct on the part of the meanest servant retains him in the household, and that bad conduct leads to his dismissal. So they think that if they themselves do well, their fate is only that of a servant, and they feel that they are ladies only so long as, while doing ill, they yet escape the end which menials reach. But why should I describe in detail what most of us know? I deem it better to keep silent than to offend the lovely women by speaking. Who does not know that a purchaser, before he buys, makes trial of everything save of a wife, and that this exception occurs through fear that she may displease him before he leads her home? Whoso takes a wife must needs have her not such as he would choose, but such as fortune grants him.

And if these things are true, as he knows who has proved them, we may imagine how much unhappiness is hidden in rooms that are reputed places of delight by those whose eyes cannot pierce the walls. Assuredly I do not affirm that these things fell to the lot of Dante; for I do not know that they did. But, whether things like these or others were the cause, true it is that when once he had parted from his wife, who had been given him as a consolation in his troubles, he never would go to her, nor let her come to him, albeit he was the father of several children by her. Let no one suppose that I would conclude from what has been said above that men should not marry. On the contrary, I decidedly commend it, but not for every one. Philosophers should leave it to wealthy fools, to noblemen, and to peasants, while they themselves find delight in philosophy, a far better bride than any other.

IV

FAMILY CARES, HONORS, AND EXILE OF DANTE

It is the general nature of things temporal that one thing entails another. Domestic cares drew Dante to public ones, where the vain honors that are attached to state positions so bewildered him that, without noting whence he had come and whither he was bound, with free rein he almost completely surrendered himself to the management of these matters. And therein fortune was so favorable to him that no legation was heard or answered, no law established or repealed, no peace made nor public war undertaken, nor, in short, was any deliberation of weight entered upon, until Dante had first given his opinion relative thereto. On him all public faith, all hope, and, in a word, all things human and divine seemed to rest. But although Fortune, the subverter of our counsels and the foe of all human stability, kept him at the summit of her wheel for several years of glorious rule, she brought him to an end far different from his beginning, since he trusted her immoderately.

In Dante's time the citizens of Florence were perversely divided into two factions, and by the operations of astute and prudent leaders each party was very powerful, so that sometimes one ruled and sometimes the other, to the displeasure of its defeated rival. In his wish to unite the divided body of his republic, Dante brought all genius, all art, all study to bear, showing the wiser citizens how great things soon perish through discord, and how little things through harmony have infinite growth. Finding, however, that his auditors' minds were unyielding and that his labor was in vain, and believing it the judgment of God, he at

first purposed to drop entirely all public affairs and live a private life. But afterwards he was drawn on by the sweetness of glory, by the empty favor of the populace, and by the persuasions of the chief citizens, coupled with his own belief that, should the occasion offer, he could accomplish much more good for his city if he were great in public affairs than he could in his private capacity completely removed therefrom.

O fond desire of human splendors, how much stronger is thy power than he who has not known thee can believe! This man, mature as he was, bred, nurtured, and trained in the sacred bosom of philosophy, before whose eyes was the downfall of kings ancient and modern, the desolation of kingdoms, provinces, and cities, and the furious onslaughts of fortune, though he sought naught else than the highest, lacked either the knowledge or the power to defend himself from thy charms.

Dante decided, then, to pursue the fleeting honor and false glory of public office. Perceiving that he could not support by himself a third party, which, in itself just, should overthrow the injustice of the two others and reduce them to unity, he allied himself with that faction which seemed to him to possess most of justice and reason—working always for that which he recognized as salutary to his country and her citizens. But human counsels are commonly defeated by the powers of heaven. Hatred and enmities arose, though without just cause, and waxed greater day by day; so that many times the citizens rushed to arms, to their utmost confusion. They purposed to end the struggle by fire and sword, and were so blinded by wrath that they did not see that they themselves would perish miserably thereby.

After each of the factions had given many proofs of their strength to their mutual loss, the time came when the secret counsels of threatening Fortune were to be disclosed. Rumor, who reports both the true and the false, announced that the foes of Dante's faction were strengthened by wise and wonderful designs and by an immense multitude of

armed men, and by this means so terrified the leaders of his party that she banished from their minds all consideration, all forethought, all reason, save how to flee in safety. Together with them Dante, instantly precipitated from the chief rule of his city, beheld himself not only brought low to the earth, but banished from his country. Not many days after this expulsion, when the populace had already rushed to the houses of the exiles, and had furiously pillaged and gutted them, the victors reorganized the city after their pleasure, condemning all the leaders of their adversaries to perpetual exile as capital enemies of the republic, and with them Dante, not as one of the lesser leaders, but as it were the chief one. Their real property was meanwhile confiscated or alienated to the victors.

This reward Dante gained for the tender love which he had borne his country! This reward Dante gained for his efforts to allay the civic discord! This reward Dante gained for having given all his care to the welfare, the peace, the tranquility of his fellow-citizens! It is manifest from this how void of truth are the favors of the people, and how little trust may be placed therein. He in whom, but a short time before, every public hope, all the affections of the citizens, every refuge of the people, seemed to be placed, suddenly, for no just cause, for no offense or crime, is furiously driven into irrevocable exile, and all by means of that very Fame who aforetime had frequently been heard to lift his praises to the stars. This was the marble statue raised to the eternal memory of his virtue! With these letters was his name inscribed on tables of gold among the fathers of his country! By such commendatory reports were thanks rendered him for his good deeds! Who, then, in view of these things, will say that our republic does not halt upon this foot?

O vain confidence of mortals, by how many lofty examples art thou continually reproved, admonished, and chastised! Alas! if Camillus, Rutilius, Coriolanus, the two Scipios, and the other ancient worthies have passed from thy memory

through lapse of time, let this recent instance make thee pursue thy pleasure with more temperate rein. Nothing in this world has less stability than popular favor. There is no hope more insane, no counsel more foolish than that which encourages one to trust therein. Let our minds, then, be lifted up to Heaven, in whose everlasting law, in whose eternal splendors, in whose true beauty, is clearly manifest the stability of Him who moves all things according to reason; and thus, leaving transitory things, we may, to avoid deception, fasten our every hope on Him, as on a fixed goal.

V

DANTE'S FLIGHT FROM FLORENCE AND HIS WANDERINGS

In such wise, then, Dante left that city whereof not only he was a citizen, but of which his ancestors had been the rebuilders. He left his wife there, together with his children, whose youthful age ill adapted them for flight. At ease concerning his wife, for he knew that she was related to one of the leaders of the opposing faction, but uncertain of his own course, he wandered now here, now there, throughout Tuscany. Under the title of her dowry, his wife with difficulty defended a small portion of his possessions from the fury of the citizens, and from the fruits thereof obtained a meagre support for herself and her little children. Therefore Dante in poverty was forced to get his living by a kind of industry to which he was a stranger.

O what righteous indignation must he repress, more bitter than death for him to bear, while hope promised him that his exile would be short—and then the return! But, after leaving Verona, whither he had first fled and where he had been graciously received by Messer Alberto della Scala, he tarried year after year, contrary to his expectation, first with the Count Salvatico in the Casentino, then with the Marquis Moruello Malaspina in Lunigiana, and finally with the della Faggiuola in the mountains near Urbino, most suitably honored in each case according to the times and the means of his host. Thence he later departed to Bologna, and from there, after

a short stay, he went on to Padua, and then back again to Verona. But perceiving that the way of return was closed on every side, and that his hope was more vain from day to day, he abandoned not only Tuscany but all Italy, and, crossing the mountains that divide it from the province of Gaul, he made his way as best he could to Paris. There he gave his whole time to the study of philosophy and theology, though likewise regathering to himself such parts of the other sciences as had gone from him by reason of his adversities.

While he was thus spending his time in study, it came to pass, beyond his expectation, that Henry, Count of Luxemburg, at the desire and command of Clement V, who was pope at this time, was elected King of the Romans, and was afterwards crowned Emperor. When Dante heard that he had left Germany in order to subjugate Italy, which in parts was rebellious to his Majesty, and that he was already besieging Brescia with a powerful force, believing, for many reasons, that the Emperor would be victor, he conceived the hope of returning to Florence by means of Henry's power and justice, although he knew that Florence was opposed to him. Wherefore, recrossing the Alps, he joined the many enemies of the Florentine party, and by embassies and letters strove to draw the Emperor from the siege of Brescia, in order that he might turn against Florence, who was the principal member of his enemies. He showed him that if she were overcome, he would have little or no trouble in securing free and unimpeded possession and dominion of all Italy.

But although Dante, and others of the same purpose, succeeded in drawing Henry thither, his coming did not have the expected result, for the resistance was far stronger than they had anticipated. And so, without having accomplished anything worthy of mention, the Emperor left, almost in despair, and directed his way toward Rome. And though in one part and another he achieved much, righted many things, and planned to do more, his too early death ruined

the whole. As a consequence of his death every one who had looked to him lost courage, and especially Dante. Without making further effort toward his return, he crossed the Apennines and entered Romagna, where his last day, which was to end all his troubles, awaited him.

At that time the Lord of Ravenna, that famous and ancient city of Romagna, was a noble knight by the name of Guido Novello da Polenta. Trained in liberal studies, he greatly honored men of worth, and especially those who excelled in knowledge. When it came to his ears that Dante was then unexpectedly in Romagna and stood in great despair, he resolved to receive and honor him, for of his worth he had known by reputation long before. Nor did the lord wait for this to be asked of him, but reflecting what shame good men must feel in asking favors, he generously came to Dante with proffers, asking as a special favor that which he knew Dante in time must ask of him, namely, that Dante should find it his pleasure to reside with him.

Since, then, the two desires, that of the invited one and that of the host, concurred in the same end, and since the liberality of the noble knight was especially pleasing to Dante, and, on the other hand, since need pressed him, without waiting for further invitation he went to Ravenna. Here he was honorably received by the lord of the city, who revived his fallen hope by kindly encouragement, gave him an abundance of suitable things, and kept the poet with him for several years, even to the end of Dante's life.

Neither amorous desires, nor tears of grief, nor household cares, nor the tempting glory of public office, nor miserable exile, nor insufferable poverty, could ever by their power divert Dante from his main intent, that of sacred studies. For, as will be seen later when separate mention is made of his works, in the midst of whatever was most cruel of the aforementioned troubles, he will be found to have employed himself in composition. And if in spite of the many and great obstacles recounted above, by

force of genius and perseverance he became so illustrious as we see him to be, what may we think he would have become with as many allies as others have, or at least with no enemies or very few? Certainly I do not know, but, were it permitted, I should say he would have become a god on earth.

VI

HIS DEATH AND FUNERAL HONORS

Since all hope, though not the desire, of ever returning to Florence was gone, Dante continued in Ravenna several years, under the protection of its gracious lord. And here he taught and trained many scholars in poetry, and especially in the vernacular, which he first, in my opinion, exalted and made esteemed among us Italians, even as Homer did his tongue among the Greeks, and Virgil his among the Latins. Although the vulgar tongue is supposed to have originated some time before him, none thought or dared to make the language an instrument of any artistic matter, save in the numbering of syllables, and in the consonance of its endings. They employed it, rather, in the light things of love. Dante showed in effect that every lofty subject could be treated of in this medium, and made our vulgar tongue above all others glorious.

But even as the appointed hour comes for every man, so Dante also, at or near the middle of his fifty-sixth year, fell ill. And having humbly and devoutly received the sacraments of the Church according to the Christian religion, and having reconciled himself to God in contrition for all that he, as a mortal, had committed against His pleasure, in the month of September in the year of Christ 1321, on the day whereon the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is celebrated by the Church, not without great sorrow on the part of the aforesaid Guido and in general of all the other citizens of Ravenna, he rendered to his Creator his weary spirit, the which, I doubt not, was received in the arms of his most

noble Beatrice, with whom, in the sight of Him who is the highest Good, having left behind him the miseries of the present life, he now lives most blissfully in that life to whose felicity we believe there is no end.

The noble-minded knight had the body of Dante placed upon a bier and adorned with a poet's ornaments, and this he had borne on the shoulders of the most eminent citizens of Ravenna to the convent of the Minor Friars in that city, with the honor he thought due to such a person. And thereupon he caused the body, followed thus far by the lamentings of nearly the whole city, to be placed in a stone sarcophagus, in which it lies to this day. Returning to the house where Dante had resided, he made, according to the custom of Ravenna, a long and elaborate discourse, both as a tribute to the virtue and high learning of the deceased, and by way of consolation to the friends whom he left behind in bitter grief. Guido purposed, if his life and fortune should continue, to honor him with so magnificent a sepulchre that if no merit of his own should render himself memorable to posterity, this of itself would do so.

This praiseworthy proposal soon became known to certain most excellent poets of Romagna who were living at that time. Thereupon, both to publish their own ability and to show their good will toward the dead poet, as well as to win the love and favor of the lord who was known to desire it, each one wrote verses which, placed for an epitaph upon the proposed tomb, by their fitting praises should testify to posterity who it was that lay therein. They sent these verses to the noble lord, but he, not long after, lost his station through great misfortune, and died at Bologna; and the erection of the tomb and the inscription of the proffered verses thereon were for this reason left undone.

These verses were shown to me some time afterwards, and finding that they had not been used, owing to the event already mentioned, and reflecting that this present composition, though not a tomb for Dante's body, is, nevertheless, as that would have been, a perpetual preserver of his memory,

I have deemed it appropriate to insert the verses at this place. But inasmuch as only one of the many poems composed would have been engraven on the marble, I think it is necessary to subjoin but one here. Wherefore, having examined them all, I consider the most worthy in form and thought to be the fourteen lines written by Master Giovanni del Virgilio, at that time a great and famous poet of Bologna, and an intimate friend of Dante. These are the verses:

Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expers,
  Quod foveat claro philosophia sinu:
Gloria musarum, vulgo gratissimus auctor,
  Hic jacet, et fama pulsat utrumque polum:
Qui loca defunctis gladiis regnumque gemellis
  Distribuit, laicis rhetoricisque modis.
Pascua Pieriis demum resonabat avenis;
  Atropos heu letum[1] livida rupit opus.
Huic ingrata tulit tristem Florentia fructum,
  Exilium, vati patria cruda suo.
Quem pia Guidonis gremio Ravenna Novelli
  Gaudet honorati continuisse ducis,
Mille trecentenis ter septem Numinis annis,
  Ad sua septembris idibus astra redit.

[1] For *laetum.*

VII

REBUKE OF THE FLORENTINES

O ungrateful fatherland! What madness, what recklessness possessed thee, when with unwonted cruelty thou didst put to flight thy most precious citizen, thy chief benefactor, thy supreme poet? Or what has since possessed thee? If perchance thou excuse thyself, laying the blame of thy evil purpose on the general fury of the time, why, when thy wrath had ceased and thy peace of mind was restored, and when thou hadst repented of the deed, didst thou not recall him? Ah! be not loth to reason a little with me, thy son, and receive what righteous indignation makes me say, as from a man who desires that thou amend, and not that thou be punished.

Does it seem to thee that thou art glorious in so many and so great titles that thou shouldst have wished to banish from thee that one, the like of whom no neighboring city can boast? Ah! tell me with what victories, what triumphs, with what virtues and worthy citizens art thou resplendent? Thy riches, a thing transient and uncertain; thy beauties, a thing fragile and failing; thy luxuries, a thing effeminate and reprehensible—these make thee famous in the false judgment of the people, who ever look more to appearances than to the truth. Alas! wilt thou glory in thy merchants and the artists in whom thou dost abound? Foolishly wilt thou do so. The former with constant avarice ply a servile trade, and art, which once was ennobled by men of genius, in that they made it their second nature, is now corrupted by this very avarice, and become of no account. Wilt thou glory then in the sloth and cowardice of those who, calling to

mind their ancestors, would gain within thy walls high station in that nobility which they work against by robbery, treachery, and deceit? Worthless glory will be thine, and the scorn of those whose opinion has a fitting basis and firm stability.

Alas! wretched mother, open thine eyes and see with some remorse what thou hast done. Be ashamed, thou that art reputed wise, for the false choice thou hast made in thine errors. Ah! if thou didst not have such counsel in thyself, why didst thou not imitate the actions of those cities which are still famous for their praiseworthy deeds? Athens, one of the eyes of Greece, equally splendid in learning, eloquence, and military power, when on her rested the rule of the world; Argos, still glorious in the titles of her kings; Smyrna, for ever to be revered for the sake of Nicholas, her bishop; Pylos, renowned for her aged Nestor; Cyme, Chios, and Colophon, splendid cities of the past—none of these was ashamed nor did they hesitate in their most glorious days eagerly to discuss the birthplace of the poet Homer, each city affirming that he was drawn from her. So strong did each one make her claim that it is not certain whence he did come; and the dispute still continues, for all make equal boast of this great citizen. And Mantua, our neighbor, from what does she derive greater fame than from the fact that Virgil, whose name they still hold in great reverence, was a Mantuan? So acceptable to all is he that his image is seen not only in public but also in many private places, showing that, notwithstanding the fact that his father was a potter, he was the ennobler of them all. Sulmona glories in Ovid, Venosa in Horace, Aquino in Juvenal, and so with many others, each arguing her claim to her son.

It had been no shame for thee to have followed the example of these cities, for it is not likely that without cause they have been so fond and tender toward such citizens. They realized what thou likewise couldst have known and canst now, namely, that the ever-enduring influence of these men, even after the ruin of the cities themselves, would

keep their names eternal; even as now, published throughout the world, they make the cities known to those who have never seen them. Thou alone, blinded by I know not what infatuation, hast chosen a different course, and, as if full glorious in thyself, hast not cared for this splendor. Thou alone, as if the Camilli, the Publicoli, the Torquati, the Fabricii, the Fabii, the Catos, and the Scipios had been thine, and by their splendid deeds had made thee famous, not only hast suffered thine ancient citizen Claudian to fall from thy hands, but hast neglected thy present poet and hast driven him from thee, banished him, and wouldst have deprived him, had it been possible, of thy name. I cannot escape being ashamed in thy behalf.

But lo! not fortune, but the natural course of things, has been so favorable to thy vicious appetite that it has performed by its eternal law what thou in brutal eagerness wouldst willingly have done, if he had fallen into thy hands —slain him. Dead is thy Dante Alighieri in that exile to which thou, jealous of his worth, didst unjustly condemn him. O crime immemorable, that the mother should envy the virtue of any of her sons! Now at last art thou free from anxiety. Now by reason of his death thou livest secure in thy faults, and canst end thy long and unjust persecutions. He cannot, dead, do that to thee which, living, he never would have done. He lies beneath another sky than thine, nor mayst thou think ever to see him more, save on that day when thou shalt see all thy citizens examined and punished by a just judge.

If then hatred, anger, and enmities cease at the death of any one, as is believed, begin to return to thyself and thy right mind. Begin to be ashamed of having acted contrary to thine ancient humanity. Begin to wish to appear a mother, and no longer a foe. Pay the debt of weeping to thy son. Proffer him thy maternal pity, and him whom thou didst cast out when he was alive, yea, didst banish as a suspect, desire at least to recover now that he is dead. Restore thy citizenship, thy bosom, thy favor to his memory. Verily,

for all that thou wert ungrateful and arrogant toward him, yet ever like a son he held thee in reverence. Never did he wish to deprive thee of the honor that would come to thee through his works, as thou didst deprive him of thy citizenship. Notwithstanding his exile was a long one, he always called himself, and wished to be called, a Florentine. Ever he preferred thee above all others, ever he loved thee.

What, then, wilt thou do? Wilt thou always persist in thine iniquity? Shall there be in thee less of humanity than in barbarians, whom we find not only to have demanded the bodies of their dead, but to have been ready to die manfully in order to recover them? Thou desirest that the world consider thee the granddaughter of famous Troy, and the daughter of Rome. Surely children should resemble their fathers and grandfathers. Priam in his grief not only begged for the body of the dead Hector, but bought it back by the payment of much gold. And the Romans, as some believe, brought the bones of the first Scipio from Liternum, albeit for good reasons he had forbidden it at his death. Though Hector by his prowess was long the defense of the Trojans, and Scipio was the liberator not only of Rome, but of all Italy, and though none can properly credit two like services to Dante, yet is he not to be held in less esteem. There was never yet a time when arms did not give way to learning.

If thou didst not at first, when it would have been most fitting, imitate the deeds and example of these wise cities, amend now and follow them. There was none of the seven that did not build a true or a false tomb for Homer. And who doubts that the Mantuans, who continue to honor the fields and the poor cottage at Piettola that belonged to Virgil, would have erected a splendid tomb for him, if Octavian Augustus, who transported his bones from Brindisi to Naples, had not ordered that the spot where he laid them should be their perpetual resting-place? Sulmona wept long merely because a spot in the island of Pontus held her Ovid. Parma, on the other hand, rejoiced in the possession of Cassius. Strive to be, therefore, the guardian of thy Dante.

Beg for him. Perform this act of humanity even if thou have no desire to recover him. By this pretense partially rid thyself of the reproach previously incurred. Beg for him. I am certain that he will not be returned to thee, but thou, at the same moment, wilt have shown thyself to be full of pity, and in thine innate cruelty wilt rejoice in not recovering him.

But to what do I encourage thee? I can scarce believe that, if the dead have aught of feeling, the body of Dante would leave its resting-place in order to return to thee. He lies with company far more to be praised than that which thou couldst afford him. He sleeps in Ravenna, a city much more to be revered than thou; and, although her age somewhat disfigures her, she was far more flourishing in her youth than thou art now. She is, as it were, a general sepulchre of most sacred persons, and there is no spot in her where one can keep from treading on venerable ashes. Who, then, would desire to return to thee and lie among thine ashes, which may be thought to preserve the wrath and iniquity that was theirs in life, and, at ill accord, to stand apart like the flames of the two Thebans?

Albeit Ravenna in ancient days was almost completely bathed in the precious blood of many martyrs, and to-day keeps their bodies out of reverence, as well as the remains of many magnificent emperors and others illustrious for their ancient families and for virtuous deeds, she rejoices not a little in having been granted by God, in addition to her other gifts, the perpetual guardianship of such a treasure as the body of him whose works hold the whole world in admiration, and of whom thou hast not known how to make thyself worthy. But certainly the joy of possessing him is not so great as the envy she bears thee in that thou holdest the title of his birthplace. And she half scorns the fact that, while she will be remembered for his last days, thou wilt be named with her for his first. Wherefore do thou remain in thine iniquity, and let Ravenna, happy in thine honors, take glory among future generations.

VIII

APPEARANCE, HABITS, AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DANTE

Such as described above was the end of Dante's life, worn out by his various studies. And since I think I have adequately shown, according to my promise, his amorous flames, his domestic and public cares, his miserable exile, and his death, I deem it proper to proceed to speak of his bodily stature, of his external appearance, and in general of the most conspicuous customs observed by him in his life. I shall then immediately pass to his notable works, composed in a time rent by the fierce whirlwind which has been briefly described above.

Our poet was of moderate height, and, after reaching maturity, was accustomed to walk somewhat bowed, with a slow and gentle pace, clad always in such sober dress as befitted his ripe years. His face was long, his nose aquiline, and his eyes rather large than small. His jaws were large, and the lower lip protruded beyond the upper. His complexion was dark, his hair and beard thick, black, and curled, and his expression ever melancholy and thoughtful. And thus it chanced one day in Verona, when the fame of his works had spread everywhere, particularly that part of his *Commedia* entitled the *Inferno,* and when he was known by sight to many, both men and women, that, as he was passing before a doorway where sat a group of women, one of them softly said to the others,—but not so softly but that she was distinctly heard by Dante and such as accompanied him—'Do you see the man who goes down

into hell and returns when he pleases, and brings back tidings of them that are below?' To which one of the others naïvely answered, 'You must indeed say true. Do you not see how his beard is crisped, and his color darkened, by the heat and smoke down there?' Hearing these words spoken behind him, and knowing that they came from the innocent belief of the women, he was pleased, and, smiling a little as if content that they should hold such an opinion, he passed on.

In both his domestic and his public demeanor he was admirably composed and orderly, and in all things courteous and civil beyond any other. In food and drink he was most temperate, both in partaking of them at the appointed hours and in not passing the limits of necessity. Nor did he show more epicurism in respect of one thing than another. He praised delicate viands, but ate chiefly of plain dishes, and censured beyond measure those who bestow a great part of their attention upon possessing choice things, and upon the extremely careful preparation of the same, affirming that such persons do not eat to live, but rather live to eat.

None was more vigilant than he in study and in whatever else he undertook, insomuch that his wife and family were annoyed thereby, until they grew accustomed to his ways, and after that they paid no heed thereto. He rarely spoke unless questioned, and then thoughtfully, and in a voice suited to the matter whereof he treated. When, however, there was cause, he was eloquent and fluent in speech, and possessed of an excellent and ready delivery. In his youth he took the greatest delight in music and song, and enjoyed the friendship and intimacy of all the best singers and musicians of his time. Led on by this delight he composed many poems, which he made them clothe in pleasing and masterly melody.

How devoted a vassal to love Dante was, has already been shown. It is the firm belief of all that this love inspired his genius to compose poetry in the vulgar tongue,

first through imitation, afterwards through a desire for glory and for a more perfect manifestation of his feelings. By a careful training of himself in the vernacular, he not only surpassed all his contemporaries, but so elucidated and beautified the language that he made then, and has made since, and will make in the future, many persons eager to be expert therein. He delighted also in being alone and removed from people, to the end that his meditations might not be disturbed. If, moreover, any particularly pleasing contemplation came upon him when he was in company, it mattered not what it was that was asked of him, he would never answer the question until he had ended or abandoned his train of thought. This peculiarity often showed itself when he was at table, or in travel with companions, and elsewhere.

In his studies he was most assiduous, insomuch that while he was occupied therewith no news that he heard could divert him from them. Some trustworthy persons relate, anent this complete devotion of his to the thing that pleased him, that once, when he chanced to be at an apothecary's shop in Siena, there was brought him a little book, very famous among men of understanding, but which he had not yet seen, although it had been promised him. He did not have, as it happened, room to place it elsewhere, so, lying breast-downwards upon a bench in front of the apothecary's, he laid the book before him and began to read with great eagerness. Now a little later in this same neighborhood, by reason of some general festival of the Sienese, there took place a grand tournament of young noblemen which created among the bystanders a great uproar—such noise as many instruments and applauding voices are wont to produce. And though many other things were done to attract attention, such as dancing by fair ladies and numerous games of youths, none saw Dante move from his position, or once lift his eyes from his book. Indeed, although he had taken his station there about the hour of three, it was after six before, having examined and summarized all the points of

the book, he rose from his position. Yet he afterwards declared to some who asked him how he could keep from watching so fine a festival as had taken place before him, that he had heard nothing. Whereupon to the first wonder of the questioners was not unduly added a second.

Moreover this poet possessed marvelous capacity, a most retentive memory, and a keen intellect. Indeed, when he was at Paris, in a disputation *de quolibet* held there in the schools of theology, wherein fourteen different theses were being maintained by various able men on divers subjects, Dante without a break gathered all the theses together in their sequence, with the arguments *pro* and *con* that were advanced by his opponents, and then, following the same order, recited them, subtly solved them, and refuted the counter-arguments—a feat that was reputed all but a miracle by them that stood by. He was possessed also of exalted genius and subtle invention, as his works, to those that understand them, reveal far more clearly than could any words of mine.

He had a consuming love for honor and fame, perchance a greater love than befitted his noble nature. But indeed what life is so humble as not to be touched by the sweetness of glory? It was due to this desire, I suppose, that he loved poetry beyond any other study. For he saw that, while philosophy surpasses all other studies in nobility, yet its excellence can be communicated to but few, and besides there are already many famous philosophers throughout the world; whereas poetry is more obvious and more delightful to every one, and poets are exceeding rare. So he hoped through poetry to obtain the unusual and splendid honor of coronation with the laurel, and therefore dedicated himself to its study and composition.

And surely his desire had been fulfilled, if fortune had been so gracious as to permit him ever to return to Florence, where alone, at the font of San Giovanni, he was minded to be crowned, in order that there, where in baptism he had received his first name, now by coronation he might receive

his second. But things so turned out that, albeit his gifts would have enabled him to receive the honor of the laurel wherever he pleased (the which rite does not increase knowledge, but is its ornament and true witness of its acquisition), yet since he ever waited for that return which never was to be, he was unwilling to receive the much-coveted honor anywhere else, and so at length died without achieving it.

But inasmuch as frequent question is made among readers as to what poetry is and what poets are, whence the word is derived and why poets are crowned with the laurel, and since few seem to have explained these matters, it pleases me to make a digression here, in which I may throw some light on the subject, returning as soon as I am able to my theme.

IX

DIGRESSION CONCERNING POETRY

The earliest people in the earliest ages, though they were rude and uncultivated, were eager to know the truth through study, the which desire is still, as we see, natural to every one. Perceiving that the heavens were moved without cessation by a fixed law, and that things on the earth had a certain plan, with diverse actions at different times, they thought there must be something whence all these had proceeded, and which as a higher force, subject to none other, ordered all the rest.

After diligent study of the matter, they imagined that this power—to which they gave the name of *divinity,* or *deity*—ought to be venerated by every kind of worship, by every honor, and by more than human service. They therefore built, out of reverence to this supreme power, spacious and surpassing edifices. These they thought should be distinguished in name, since they were different in form, from those which men inhabited, and so they called them temples. Similarly they appointed various ministers, who should be sacred and sequestered from all worldly care, revered above other men for their wisdom, age, and manner of life. These were to occupy themselves solely with divine services, and thus were called priests (*sacerdoti*). Moreover, in representation of this imagined Divine Essence, they made magnificent statues of various forms, and, for its services, vessels of gold, marble tables, and purple vestments, together with such accessories as might be appropriate for the sacrifices which they established.

In order that to such a power no silent nor all but mute honor should be paid, it seemed meet for them to propitiate it with words of lofty sound, and so render it favorable to their necessities. And since they deemed that this Being exceeded all else in nobleness, they were anxious to find words far above any plebeian or public style of speaking, whereby they might worthily discourse before the Divinity, and offer it sacred adulation. Furthermore, that these words might appear to have the greater efficacy, they desired that they should be arranged according to laws of rhythm, whereby some sweetness might be heard, and all harshness and tediousness be removed. It was clearly fitting, moreover, that this should be done not in a vulgar or habitual form of speech, but in a manner artistic, exquisite, and new. This form the Greeks termed *poetic*, whence it came about that whatever was cast in such a mold was called *poetry*, and that they who created it, or employed this manner of speaking, were given the name of *poets*. This, then, was the origin of the terms *poet* and *poetry;* and though others assign different reasons, perhaps good ones, this explanation pleases me best.

This good and laudable desire of the rude age moved many, in a world growing through knowledge, to various fictions, and, while the first people honored only one deity, their successors represented that there were many, though they said that this one held pre-eminence above all the others. These several deities, they held, were the Sun and Moon, Saturn and Jupiter, and each of the other seven planets, their divinity being inferred from their effects. Later they came to hold that everything useful to man (although it were of the earth) was a deity—like fire, water, earth itself, and such things; and to all of these were ordained verses and honors and sacrifices.

Following on this, various men in various places, some by one fiction, some by another, began to make themselves stronger than the ignorant multitude of their districts, deciding their crude disputes, not by written law, which did not

exist as yet, but according to a natural equity, whereof one had more knowledge than another. Being naturally more enlightened, they ordered their lives and habits, and resisted by bodily force every opposition as it arose. They began, also, to call themselves kings, to appear before the people with slaves and ornaments, neither of which had been found heretofore among men. They began to make themselves obeyed, and ultimately to make themselves worshiped; which, if only one presumed so far, came about without much difficulty. For to the rude peoples who saw these actions of theirs they seemed not men, but gods.

Not wishing to trust overmuch to their mere strength, these men began to magnify the religions, and to overawe the subjects through their faith therein; and to secure by oaths the obedience of those whom they could not have constrained by force. Furthermore, they took care to deify their fathers, their grandfathers, and their ancestors, in order that they themselves should the more be feared and held in reverence by the multitude. These things could not suitably be done without the service of poets; who, in order to spread abróad their own fame, please their lords, delight the subjects, and persuade every one to act virtuously, made the people believe that which the princes wished they should believe. Under cover of various and masterly fictions—hardly to be understood by the vulgar of to-day, not to mention those of that time—they wrote things that, had they been spoken openly, would have had the opposite effect.

Both for the new gods and for the men who feigned that they were born of gods, these poets employed the same style that the first people used in reference to the true God only, and for his praise. From this the deeds of able men came to be paralleled with those of the gods, and hence arose the chant in lofty verse of the battles and other notable acts of men, mingled with those of the gods. This, then, was and is to-day, together with the other things above mentioned, the office and function of every poet. But since many ignorant persons believe that poetry is naught but

fabulous speech, it pleases me, beyond my intention, briefly to show that poetry is theology, before I come to tell why poets are crowned with the laurel.

If we apply our minds, and examine it by reason, I think we can easily discover that the ancient poets have followed, so far as is possible for the human mind, the steps of the Holy Spirit, which, as we see in Holy Scripture, revealed to future generations its highest secrets by the mouths of many, making them utter under a veil that which in due time it intended to make known openly through works. Therefore, if we closely examine their writings, we shall see that poets described beneath the mask of certain fictions (to the end that the imitator might not appear different from the thing imitated) that which had been, or which was in their day, or that which they presumed or desired would happen in the future.

Wherefore, although the two forms of writing do not have the same end in view, but only a like method of treatment—whereto my mind is chiefly directed at present—the same praise may be given to both in the words of Gregory, who said of the sacred Scripture what may also be said of poetry, namely, that in the same account it discloses the text and its underlying mystery. Thus at the same moment by the one it disciplines the wise, and by the other it strengthens the foolish. It possesses openly that by virtue of which it may nourish little children, and preserves in secret that whereby it holds rapt in admiration the minds of sublime thinkers. Thus it is like a river, if I may use the figure, wherein the little lamb may wade, and the great elephant freely swim. But let us proceed to the verification of these statements.

X

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POETRY AND THEOLOGY

Holy Scripture—which we call theology—sometimes under the form of history, again in the meaning of a vision, now by the signification of a lament, and in many other ways, designs to reveal to us the high mystery of the incarnation of the Divine Word, his life, the circumstances of his death, his victorious resurrection and wonderful ascension, and his other acts, so that, being thus taught, we may attain to that glory which He by his death and resurrection opened to us, after it had been long closed through the sin of the first man. In like manner do poets in their works—which we term poetry—sometimes under fictions of various gods, again by the transformation of men into imaginary forms, and at times by gentle persuasion, reveal to us the causes of things, the effects of virtues and of vices, what we ought to flee and what follow; in order that we may attain by virtuous action the end that they, although they did not rightly know the true God, believed to be our supreme salvation.

Thus the Holy Spirit wished to show by the green bush, wherein Moses saw God like unto a burning flame, the virginity of her that above every other creature is pure, who was to be the habitation and retreat of the Lord of Nature, and yet was not to be contaminated by her conception, nor by the birth of the Word of the Father. In the vision seen by Nebuchadnezzar of the statue of many metals, demolished by a stone which, in turn, was changed into a mountain, the Holy Spirit would declare that all past ages

were to be overthrown by the doctrine of Christ, who was and is a living rock, and that the Christian religion, born of this rock, was to become a thing immovable and ever-enduring like the mountains. By the lamentations of Jeremiah it would proclaim the future destruction of Jerusalem.

In like manner our poets, in feigning that Saturn had many children, of whom he devoured all save four, desired to make us perceive merely that Saturn is time, wherein everything is brought forth, and which, even as it produces, also destroys all things and brings them to naught. The four children undevoured by him are first, Jupiter, that is, the element of fire; secondly, Juno, spouse and sister of Jupiter, in other words the air, by means of which fire works its effects here below; thirdly, Neptune, god of the sea, or the element of water; the fourth and last is Pluto, god of hell, that is, the earth, which is lower than any other element.

Similarly, our poets feign that Hercules was transformed from a man into a god, and Lycaon into a wolf. They wished to point the moral that by virtuous action, like that of Hercules, man becomes a god by participation in heaven, and that by acting viciously with Lycaon, albeit one seem a man, of a truth he can be said to be that beast which every one knows through an effect most similar to his defect; even as Lycaon, by reason of his greed and avarice, is represented as changed into a wolf, since these are the characteristics of a wolf. Likewise our poets imagine the beauty of the Elysian Fields, by which I understand the sweetness of Paradise; and the obscurity of Dis, which I take to mean the bitterness of Hell. This they did that we, attracted by the pleasure of the one and terrified by the suffering of the other, might pursue the virtues that will lead us to Elysium, and flee the vices that would cause us to be ferried over to Dis.

I omit the illumination of these things by more detailed illustration, for—although I should wish to make them as clear as is possible and fitting, since they would be most

pleasing and would strengthen my argument—I doubt not that I should be carried much farther than the main subject requires, and further than that I do not wish to go.

Certainly enough has been said to make us understand that theology and poetry agree in their method of treatment. But in their subject-matter I say they are not only most diverse, but are even to some extent opposed to each other. For the subject of sacred theology is divine truth, while that of ancient poetry is the men and gods of the pagans. They are opposed, in that theology presupposes nothing unless it be true, while poetry puts forth certain things as true that are surely false, misleading, and contrary to the Christian religion. But certain lackwits rise up against the poets, saying that they have composed evil and indecent fables not consonant with the truth, and that they ought to show their ability and teach their doctrines to mortals in other form than that of fictions; and for this reason I wish to proceed a little further in the present reasoning.

Let these persons, then, consider the visions of Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others of the Old Testament, which, described by the divine pen, are revealed by Him for whom there is neither beginning nor end. Let them in the New Testament also consider the visions of the Evangelist, which are full of wonderful truth for those who understand them. And if no poetic fable is found that is so far from truth or probability as, in many places on the surface, these appear to be, let it be conceded, on the other hand, that poets alone have written fables that are not likely to give either pleasure or profit. I might proceed without replying to the censure which they pass on poets because they have made known their teachings in fables or under the guise of fables, for I know that while in this they foolishly blame the poets, they incautiously fall into censuring that Spirit who is no less than the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Yet, notwithstanding, I have in mind to satisfy them somewhat.

It is manifest that everything acquired by labor has more

sweetness than that which comes without effort. The obvious truth, since it is quickly and easily seized, delights us and passes into the memory. But in order that, acquired by toil, it should be more pleasing and for that reason the better retained, the poets concealed it under many things that are not, apparently, in accord therewith. They chose fables rather than any other disguise, because the beauties thereof attract those whom neither philosophic demonstrations nor persuasions are able to draw. What shall we say, then, of poets? Shall we hold that they were madmen, as these present lackwits, not knowing whereof they speak, deem them? Certainly they were not. They were rather in their acts men of profound understanding, which is hidden in the fruit, and of an excellent and highly wrought eloquence, which is evident in the bark and leaves. But let us return to the place where we left off.

I say that theology and poetry can be considered as almost one and the same thing when their subject is the same. Indeed I go further, and assert that theology is simply the poetry of God. What is it but poetic fiction to say in one place of Scripture that Christ is a lion and in another a lamb, now that He is a serpent and now a dragon, and in still another place that He is a rock? And He is called by many other names, to repeat all of which would take too long. What else signify the words of the Savior in the Gospel, if not a teaching different from the outward sense, which manner of speaking we term, using a more common word, allegory. It is clear, then, that not only is poetry theology, but also that theology is poetry. And truly if my words, in so great a matter, merit little credence, I shall not be disturbed; at least let Aristotle, a most worthy authority on all great questions, be believed, who affirmed that he found the poets were the first theologians. Let this suffice for this part, and let us turn to show why poets alone among learned men have been granted the honor of the laurel crown.

XI

OF THE LAUREL BESTOWED ON POETS

Among the many nations that dwell upon the surface of the earth, the Greek, it is believed, was that one to whom philosophy first revealed herself and her secrets. From her treasures they drew forth the military principle, the life of the State, and many other precious things, whereby they became more honored and famous than any other nation. Among the things drawn forth from this treasury was that sacred maxim of Solon which is placed at the beginning of this little work. And to the end that their republic, which was then more flourishing than any other, should walk upright and stand on both feet, they ordained and decreed penalties for evil-doers and rewards for the deserving.

Chief among the rewards for the virtuous was the crowning with laurel leaves, in public and with the public consent, of poets triumphant after their labors, and of emperors who had enlarged by victory their republic; for they deemed that equal glory belonged to him by whose valor human things were preserved and increased, and to him who treated of things divine. Albeit the Greeks were the inventors of this honor, it later passed over to the Latins, when glory and arms throughout the world gave way to the Roman name, and this custom, at least in the coronation of poets—although that occurs but seldom—survives at Rome to this day. But an attempt to see why the laurel, rather than any other leaf, should be chosen, ought not to prove tedious.

There are some who, since they know that Daphne, the beloved of Phoebus, was changed into a laurel, and that Phoebus was the first author and patron of poets, as well as a triumpher, are wont to believe that for the love he bore these leaves he crowned his lyres and his triumphs with

them, and that men followed him as their exemplar. So they think this first action of Phoebus is the cause of the coronation of poets and of emperors and the use of these leaves therefor down to this day. Certainly this opinion does not displease me, nor do I deny that this may have been the way it came to pass; nevertheless, I am moved by a different reason, which is this.

According to the opinion of those who examine the nature and virtues of trees, the laurel, among its other properties, has three that are especially notable and noteworthy. The first is that, as we perceive, it never loses its verdure or leaves. The second is that this tree has never been found struck by lightning, which thing we do not read to have been the fortune of any other. And the third is that, as we know, it is very fragrant.

The ancient originators of this honor thought that these three properties corresponded to the virtuous works of poets and victorious emperors. In the first place, the perpetual greenness of the leaves was said to illustrate the fame of their works, in that the works of those who have been crowned with the laurel, or shall be crowned in the future, will always remain alive. Secondly, they considered the works of these men to be of so great power that neither the fire of envy nor the thunderbolt of long-enduring time, which consumes all things, would ever be able to blast them, any more than the lightning from heaven strikes this tree. Finally, they said that these works through lapse of time would never be less pleasing and grateful to him who heard or read them, but would always be acceptable and fragrant. Hence a crown of these leaves, rather than of any other, was suited to men whose productions, so far as we can see, were conformable thereto. Therefore not without reason did our Dante ardently desire this honor, or rather the proof of so great virtue as this is to those who make themselves worthy of having their temples so adorned. But it is time to return to that place whence we departed in entering upon this discussion.

XII

QUALITIES AND DEFECTS OF DANTE

Our poet, in addition to what has been said above, was of a lofty and disdainful spirit. On one occasion a friend, moved by entreaties, labored that Dante might return to Florence—which thing the poet desired above all else—but he found no way thereto with those who then held the government in their hands save that Dante should remain in prison for a certain time, and after that be presented as a subject for mercy at some public solemnity in our principal church, whereby he should be free and exempt from all sentences previously passed upon him. But this seemed to Dante a fitting procedure for abject, if not infamous, men and for no others. Therefore, notwithstanding his great desire, he chose to remain in exile rather than return home by such a road. O laudable and magnanimous scorn, how manfully hast thou acted in repressing the ardent desire to return, when it was only possible by a way unworthy of a man nourished in the bosom of philosophy!

Dante in many similar ways set great store by himself, and, as his contemporaries report, did not deem himself worth less than in truth he was. This trait, among other times, appeared once notably, when he was with his party at the head of the government of the republic. The faction that was out of power had, through Pope Boniface VIII, summoned a brother or relative of Philip, King of France, whose name was Charles, to direct the affairs of the city. All the chiefs of the party to which Dante held were assembled in council to look to this matter, and there among other things they provided that an embassy should be sent

to the Pope, who was then at Rome, in order to persuade him to oppose the coming of the said Charles, or to make him come with the consent of the ruling party. When they came to consider who should be the head of this embassy, all agreed on Dante. To their request he replied, after quietly meditating on it for a while, 'If I go, who stays? And if I stay, who goes?' as if he alone was of worth among them all, and as if the others were nothing worth except through him. These words were understood and remembered, but that which followed from them is not pertinent to the present subject, wherefore I leave it and pass on.

Furthermore, this excellent man was most undaunted in all his adversities. In one thing alone he was, I do not know whether I should say passionate, or merely impatient: to wit, that after he went into exile he devoted himself much more to party affairs than befitted his quality, and more than he was willing to have others believe. To the end that it may be clear for what party he was so vehement and determined, it seems to me that I ought to write something further.

I believe it was the just anger of God which permitted, a long time ago, that nearly all Tuscany and Lombardy should be divided into two parties. Whence they received these names I do not know, but one was called, and is still called, the Guelf party, and the other the Ghibelline. Of such power and reverence were these two names in the foolish minds of many, that, in order to defend his party against the other, it was not hard for a man to lose all his possessions, nay, and finally his life too, if there were need. Under these titles the Italian cities sustained most grievous oppression and vicissitudes, and among them our city, which was as it were the head, now of one party, and now of the other, according as the citizens changed. Dante's ancestors, for example, were twice, as Guelfs, exiled by the Ghibellines, and it was under the title of Guelf that he held the reins of the republic in Florence. It was not,

however, by the Ghibellines, but by the Guelfs, that he was banished. And when he found that he could not return, his sympathies changed, so that none was a fiercer Ghibelline and more violent adversary of the Guelfs than he.

Now that for which I am most ashamed in the service of his memory is that, according to the common report in Romagna, any feeble woman or child, in speaking of parties and condemning the Ghibellines, could move him to such rage that he would have been led to throw stones if the speaker had not become silent. This bitterness continued even to his death. I am ashamed to sully the reputation of so great a man by the mention of any fault in him, but my purpose to some extent requires it, for if I am silent about the things less worthy of praise, I shall destroy much faith in the laudable qualities already mentioned. I ask, therefore, the pardon of Dante, who perchance, while I am writing this, looks down at me with scornful eye from some high region of heaven.

Amid so great virtue, amid so much learning, as we have seen was the portion of this wondrous poet, licentiousness found a large place; and this not only in his youth, but also in his maturity. Although this vice is natural, common, and in a certain sense necessary, it not only cannot be commended, but cannot even be decently excused. But what mortal shall be the just judge to condemn it? Not I. O little strength! O bestial appetite of men! What influence cannot women have over us if they will, since without caring they have so much? They possess charm, beauty, natural desire, and many other qualities that continually work in their behalf in the hearts of men.

To show that this is true, let us pass over what Jupiter did for the sake of Europa, Hercules for Iole, and Paris for Helen, since these are matters of poetry, and many of little judgment would call them fables. But let the matter be illustrated by instances fitting for none to deny. Was there yet more than one woman in the world when our first father, breaking the commandment given him by the very

mouth of God, yielded to her persuasions? In truth there was but one. And David, notwithstanding the fact that he had many wives, no sooner caught sight of Bathsheba than for her sake he forgot God, his own kingdom, himself, and his honor, becoming first an adulterer and then a homicide. What may we think he would have done, had she laid any commands upon him? And did not Solomon, to whose wisdom none ever attained save the Son of God, forsake Him who had made him wise, and kneel to adore Balaam in order to please a woman? What did Herod? What did many others, led by naught else save their pleasure? Among so many and so great ones, then, our poet may pass on, not excused, but accused with a brow much less drawn than if he were alone. Let this recital of his more notable customs suffice for the present.

XIII

OF THE DIFFERENT WORKS WRITTEN BY DANTE

This glorious poet composed many works during his lifetime, an orderly arrangement of which would, I think, be fitting, in order that his works may not be attributed to some one else, and that the works of another may not be ascribed to him.

In the first place, while his tears still flowed for the death of Beatrice, in his twenty-sixth year or thereabouts, he brought together in a little volume, entitled *Vita Nuova,* certain marvelously beautiful pieces in rime, like sonnets and canzoni, which he had previously written at various times. Before each one he wrote in order the causes that had led him to compose it, and after each one he placed its divisions. Although in his maturer years he was greatly ashamed of this little book, nevertheless, if his age be considered, it is very beautiful and pleasing, especially to the common people.

Several years after this compilation, he looked down from the summit of the government over which he was placed, and saw on a large scale, as from such places may be seen, what is the life of men, what are the faults of the crowd, how few rise above the masses, and of how great honor these are worthy. He observed, too, those who hold close to the crowd, and how great should be their confusion. And while he was condemning the pursuits of such men, and much more commending his own, there came into his mind a lofty thought, in the execution of which he purposed at one time —that is, in the same work—to punish the vicious with the heaviest penalties, and honor the worthy with the highest rewards. And in showing his ability he hoped to gain for

himself eternal glory. And since, as has been shown, he preferred poetry to every other study, he planned to create a poetic composition. Having long premeditated what was to be done, in his thirty-fifth year he began to put into effect what he had before deliberated upon, namely, to censure and reward the lives of men according to the diversity of their merits. And inasmuch as he saw that life was of three sorts—the vicious life, the life of departing from vice and advancing toward virtue, and the virtuous life—he admirably divided his work, which he entitled *Commedia*, into three books, in the first of which he censured the wicked and in the last rewarded the good. The three books he again divided into cantos, and the cantos into rhythms (*ritmi*), as may be plainly seen. He composed it in rime in the vernacular with such art, and in so wonderful and beautiful an order, that there has yet been none who could justly find any fault therewith.

How subtle a poet he was throughout this work can be seen by those to whom is given a faculty great enough to understand the poem. But as we see that great things cannot be comprehended in a short space of time, we must conclude that an undertaking so great, so lofty, and so elaborate, as was the poetic inclusion under rimed vernacular verse of all the actions of men and their deserts, could not be brought to its end in a little while. Especially would this be true of a man agitated by many and varied chances of fortune, all of them full of anguish and poisoned with bitterness, as was shown above to have been the lot of Dante. Therefore from the hour when, as stated above, he gave himself to this high work, even to the end of his life did his labor continue; yet he composed other works in the meantime, as will appear. Nor will it be beside the mark to touch in part on certain accidents that befell the beginning and the end of this work.

XIV

ON CERTAIN INCIDENTS RELATING TO THE DIVINA COMMEDIA

The first part of the poem, a work of great renown, [illegible] entitled the Inferno. He wrote it not in the manner of a history but as a most Christian poem, a thing which had never before been done under this title. And now when he was most intent on his glorious work and had completed the first seven cantos, covering the principal subdivisions of his habitation of flight, as it is proper to call it, he suddenly abandoned his work at the end of that, and wandered overseas to Ireland for many years among divers friends and lords.

But even as we certainly must believe that human life were nothing contrary to what God ordains, whereby the one does the work of the damned and though she can perhaps delay it, so it happened that some one found the same cantos that [illegible] had composed. He made the discovery while wandering by land amidst dwellings among the clans of Ireland's people, which had been hardly ensnared into sacred places at the time when the ungrateful and [illegible] multitude, more eager for booty than for just revenge, [illegible] necessarily rushed to the house.

This person read the cantos with admiration, though he did not know what they were; and, impelled by his exceeding delight in them, he carefully withdrew them from the place where they lay, and brought them to one of our citizens, by name Dino di Messer Lapo Garsoni, a famous poet of that time, and a man of high intelligence

Upon reading them, Dino marveled no less than he who had brought them, both because of their beautiful, polished, and ornate style, and because of the depth of meaning that he seemed to discover hidden under the beautiful covering of words.

By reason of these qualities, and of the place where the cantos were found, Dino and the other deemed them to be the work of Dante, as in truth they were. Troubled because the work was unfinished, and unable of themselves to imagine its issue, they determined to find out where Dante was and to send him what they had found, in order that he might, if possible, give the contemplated end to so fine a beginning.

They found, after some investigation, that he was with the Marquis Moruello. Accordingly they wrote of their desire, not to Dante, but to the Marquis, and forwarded the seven cantos. When the latter, who was a man of great understanding, read them, he greatly praised them to himself, and, showing them to Dante, asked him if he knew whose work they were. Dante, recognizing them at once, replied that they were his own. Whereupon the Marquis begged of him that it might be his pleasure not to leave so lofty a beginning without its fitting end. 'I naturally supposed,' said Dante, 'that, in the general ruin of my things, these and many other books of mine were lost. Both from this belief and from the multitude of other troubles that came upon me by reason of my exile, I had utterly abandoned the high design laid hold of for this work. But since fortune unexpectedly has restored the work to me, and since it is agreeable to you, I will try to recall the original idea, and proceed according as grace shall be given me.' And so after a time and not without toil he resumed the interrupted subject, and wrote:

Io dico, seguitando, che assai prima, etc.,

where the coupling of the parts of the work may be clearly recognized upon close examination.

When Dante had thus recommenced the great work, he did not finish it, as many might think, without frequent interruption. Indeed many times, according as the seriousness of supervening events demanded, he put it aside, sometimes for months, again for years, unable to accomplish anything on it. Nor could he make such haste that death did not overtake him before he was able to publish all of it.

It was his custom, when he had finished six or eight cantos, more or less, to send them, from wherever he might be, before any other person saw them, to Messer Cane della Scala, whom he held in reverence beyond all other men. After he had seen them, Dante would make a copy of the cantos for whoever wished them. In such wise he had sent Messer Cane all save the last thirteen cantos—and these he had written—when he died without making any provision therefor. And although his children and disciples made frequent search for many months among his papers, to see if he had put an end to his work, in no way could they find the remaining cantos. All his friends were therefore distressed that God had not lent him to the world at least long enough for him to complete the little of his work that remained. And since they could not find the cantos, they abandoned further search in despair.

Dante's two sons, Jacopo and Piero, both of whom were poets, being persuaded thereto by their friends, resolved to complete their father's work, so far as in them lay, that it might not remain unfinished. But just at this time Jacopo, who was much more fervent in this matter than his brother, saw a remarkable vision, that not only put an end to his foolish presumption, but revealed to him where the thirteen cantos were that were missing.

An excellent man of Ravenna by the name of Piero Giardino, long time a disciple of Dante, related that eight months after the death of his master the aforesaid Jacopo came to him one night near the hour of dawn, and told

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him that in his sleep a little while before on this same night he had seen Dante, his father, draw near to him. He was clad in the whitest raiment, and his face shone with unwonted light. The son in his dream asked him if he were living, and heard him reply, 'Yes, not in our life, but in the true.' Again he seemed to question him, asking if he had finished his poem before passing to that true life, and, if he had completed it, where was the missing part which they had never been able to find. And again he seemed to hear in answer, 'Yes, I finished it.' And then it seemed to him that his father took him by the hand and led him to the room where he was wont to sleep when alive, and touching a spot there, said, 'Here is that for which thou hast so long sought.' And with these words his sleep and his father left him.

Jacopo said that he could not postpone coming to Messer Piero to tell him what he had seen, in order that together they might go and search the place—which he kept exactly in his memory—and learn whether it was a true spirit or a false delusion that had revealed this to him. While there still remained a good part of the night they set out together, and, coming to the designated spot, they found a matting fastened to the wall. Gently lifting this, they discovered a little opening which neither of them had ever seen or known of before. Therein they found some writings, all mildewed by the dampness of the wall, and on the point of rotting had they remained there a little longer. Carefully cleaning them of the mold, they read them, and found that they were the long sought thirteen cantos. With great joy, therefore, they copied them, and sent them first, according to the custom of the author, to Messer Cane, and then attached them, as was fitting, to the incomplete work. In such wise the poem that had been many years in composition was finished.

XV

WHY THE COMMEDIA WAS WRITTEN IN THE VULGAR TONGUE

Many persons, and among them wise ones, ask some such question as this. Inasmuch as Dante was a most distinguished man of learning, why did he choose to compose so great and notable a work, and one dealing with so lofty a subject as that of his *Commedia,* in the Florentine idiom, and why not rather in Latin verse, as preceding poets had done? To this question I reply that two principal reasons, among many, occur to me. The first is that he did it in order to be of the most general use to his fellow-citizens and to other Italians. For he knew that if he wrote in Latin metre, as previous poets had done, he would have been useful only to the learned, while by writing in the vernacular he would accomplish something that had never been done before, without preventing his being understood by men of letters. While showing the beauty of our idiom and his own excellent art therein, he gave both delight and understanding of himself to the unlearned, who formerly had been neglected by every one.

The second reason that moved him to employ the vernacular was this. When he saw that liberal studies had been forsaken by all, and especially by princes and other great men to whom poetic works are commonly dedicated, and that, as a result, the divine works of Virgil and of other lofty poets not only were come to be held in light regard, but were almost despised by the majority, he actually began, as his lofty subject demanded, in this manner:

Ultima regna canam, fluido contermina mundo,
Spiritibus que lata patent, que premia solvunt
Pro meritis cuicumque suis, etc.

There, however, he let it stand, for he believed that in vain would crusts of bread be put in the mouths of those who were still sucking milk. He therefore began his work anew in a style suited to modern feelings, and continued it in the vulgar tongue.

This book of the *Commedia,* as some one tells us, he dedicated to three illustrious Italians, according to its threefold division, to each one his part, as follows. The first part, the *Inferno,* he dedicated to Uguccione della Faggiuola, then greatly celebrated in Tuscany as the Lord of Pisa. The second part, the *Purgatorio,* he dedicated to the Marquis Moruello Malaspina; and the third, the *Paradiso,* to Frederick III, King of Sicily. There are some who maintain that he dedicated the whole to Messer Cane della Scala. As to which of these two statements is correct, we have no evidence save the gratuitous opinions of different persons; nor is it so important a matter as to need serious investigation.

XVI

OF THE BOOK DE MONARCHIA AND OTHER WORKS

At the coming of the Emperor Henry VII, this illustrious author wrote another book, in Latin prose, called the *De Monarchia*. This he divided into three books, in accordance with three questions which he settled therein. In the first book he proves by argument of logic that the Empire is necessary for the well-being of the world. This is his first point. In the second book, proceeding by arguments drawn from history, he shows that Rome rightly holds the title of the Empire. This is his second point. In the third book by theological arguments he proves that the authority of the Empire proceeds directly from God, and not through the mediation of any vicar, as the clergy appear to maintain. This is his third point.

This book, several years after the death of its author, was condemned by Cardinal Beltrando of Poggetto, Papal Legate in the parts of Lombardy, during the pontificate of John XXII. The reason of the condemnation was this. Louis, Duke of Bavaria, had been chosen King of the Romans by the Electors of Germany, and came to Rome for his coronation, against the pleasure of the aforenamed Pope John. And, while there, against ecclesiastical ordinances he created pope a Minor Friar called Brother Piero della Corvara, besides many cardinals and bishops; and had himself crowned there by this new pontiff.

Now inasmuch as his authority was questioned in many cases, he and his followers, having found this book by Dante, began to make use of its arguments to defend themselves and their authority; whereby the book, which was scarcely

known up to this time, became very famous. Afterwards, however, when Louis had returned to Germany, and his followers, especially the clergy, began to decline and disperse, the aforesaid Cardinal, since there was none to oppose him therein, seized the book and condemned it in public to the flames, charging that it contained heretical matters.

In like manner he attempted to burn the bones of the author, and would have done so, to the eternal infamy and confusion of his own memory, had he not been opposed by a good and noble Florentine knight, by name Pino della Tosa. This man and Messer Ostagio da Polenta were great in the sight of the Cardinal, and happened to be in Bologna where this matter was being mooted.

Besides the foregoing, Dante composed two very beautiful eclogues, which he dedicated and sent, in reply to certain verses, to Master Giovanni del Virgilio, of whom mention has already been made. He composed also a comment in prose in the Florentine vulgar tongue on three of his elaborated canzoni. Although he seems to have had the intention, when he began, of commenting on them all, nevertheless, owing either to change of plan or to lack of time, we find no more than these three treated of by him. This comment he entitled the *Convivio,* a very beautiful and admirable little work.

Later, when already near his death, he wrote a little book in Latin prose which he entitled *De Vulgari Eloquentia,* wherein he purposed to give instruction in the writing of rime to whoever wished to undertake it. Though he seems to have had in mind to compose four parts to this little work, either he was overtaken by death before he finished it, or the other parts have been lost, since only two remain. This excellent poet also wrote many letters in Latin prose, whereof several are still extant. Moreover he composed many elaborated canzoni, sonnets, and *ballate,* both on love and on morals, in addition to those that appear in the *Vita Nuova,* but of these I do not care at present to make especial mention.

In such matters, then, as are told of above, this illustrious man consumed what time he could steal from amorous sighs, piteous tears, private and public cares, and from the various fluctuations of hostile fortune—works much more acceptable to God and man than the deceits, frauds, falsehoods, robberies, and treacheries which the majority of men practise to-day, seeking as they do by different ways one and the same goal, namely to become rich, as if on that rested all good, all honor, all felicity.

O foolish minds! A brief portion of an hour, when the spirit is separated from the perishable body, will reduce all these shameful toils to naught. And time, wherein all things are consumed, will either straightway efface all memory of the rich man, or will preserve it for a certain period to his great shame. This certainly will not befall our poet, but rather, even as instruments of war become brighter through use, so will it be with his name; the more it is furbished by time, the more brilliant it will ever be. Therefore let him labor in his vanities who will, and let that suffice him, without desiring to blame the virtuous action of another with censure that he himself does not understand.

XVII

EXPLANATION OF THE DREAM OF DANTE'S MOTHER AND CONCLUSION

It has been briefly shown—besides certain other matters by way of digression—what were the origin, studies, the life, habits, and works of that glorious man and illustrious poet, Dante Alighieri, so far as it has been granted me by Him who is the giver of every grace. I know well that it could have been told by many others much better and more discreetly, but of him who does what he can no more is required. That I have written as best I could, does not take away the power of speech from another who thinks he can write better than I have done. Indeed, if I have erred in any part, I shall give material to another for writing in order that he may tell the truth of our Dante; for I have found no one who has written of him down to this time. But my labor is not yet at an end. A small matter which I promised in the course of this little work, remains for me to declare—namely, the dream that the poet's mother had when she was pregnant with him. Of this I intend to speak as briefly as I may, and bring my discourse to an end.

This gentle lady in her pregnancy dreamed that she lay at the foot of a lofty laurel tree, beside a clear spring, and that she there brought forth a little son. He, as I have before narrated, while partaking of the berries that fell from the laurel and of the waters of the spring, suddenly became a great shepherd, and showed himself passing fond of the leaves of the tree. While he was endeavoring to obtain them he seemed to fall, and suddenly she seemed to see

a most beautiful peacock in his stead. Stirred by this marvel, the gentle lady broke her sweet slumber, and saw him no more.

The Divine Goodness, to-day and from eternity, foresees every future event, when nature, its general minister, is about to produce some strange effect among mortals. Moved by its own goodness, it is wont to make us aware thereof through some demonstration, either by sign or by dream, or in some other manner, to the end that we may be convinced by this foreshadowing that all knowledge rests in the Lord of nature, the all-producer.

Such prefiguration, if we observe closely, was made for the coming into the world of that poet of whom so much has been said above. And by whom could He have made it seen or observed with such affection as by her who was to be, indeed was already, the mother of the thing revealed? Certainly to her only was it shown. And what God revealed to her is already manifest to us through the above account, but what He intended thereby must be scrutinized with a keener vision. It seemed to the lady that she gave birth to a son, and this in truth came to pass a little after the vision was seen, but what the lofty laurel signifies, beneath which she bore him, is now to be examined.

It is the opinion of astrologers and of many natural philosophers that by the virtue and influence of the superior bodies the inferior are produced, nourished, and, if a most powerful cause illumined by divine grace does not resist, are guided. Wherefore, observing what superior body is most powerful in the degree which mounts above the horizon at the hour when any one is born, they say that that person is completely controlled by this more potent body, that is, in accordance with its qualities. It seems to me therefore that by the laurel, beneath which it appeared to the lady that she gave our Dante to the world, the disposition of heaven is shown, for this at his nativity foretold magnanimity and poetic eloquence. Both these qualities are signified by the laurel, the tree of Phoebus, with whose

leaves poets are wont to be crowned, as has already been clearly shown above.

The berries whereof the child took nourishment I understand to be the issues proceeding from such a disposition of heaven. These issues are the books of poetry and their teachings whereon our Dante was most deeply nourished, that is to say, instructed. The clear spring, of whose waters he seemed to drink, signifies naught else, I think, save the richness of the teachings of moral and natural philosophy. Even as a spring proceeds from abundance hidden in the bowels of the earth, so these teachings take essence and cause from a wealth of demonstrative reasonings, which we may call earthly abundance. And even as food cannot be well digested without drink, so no knowledge can be well adapted to the intellect unless it be ordered and disposed by philosophic demonstration. Wherefore we may definitely conclude that by the clear water, that is by philosophy, he digested in his stomach, in other words in his intellect, the berries whereon he fed, namely poetry, which, as has already been said, he studied with all industry.

His sudden transformation into a shepherd illustrates the excellence of his genius, for he straightway became a man of such power that in a short time he comprehended through study that which was needed to become a shepherd, that is, a giver of pasturage to other minds that have need thereof. Now, as every one may easily understand, there are two kinds of shepherds: the one, shepherds of the body; the other, shepherds of the soul. Those of the body are of two sorts. First there are those who are commonly called shepherds, namely, the keepers of sheep, oxen, and of other animals. The second class is made up of fathers of families, by whose care the flocks of children, servants, and of others subject to them, must be fed, guarded, and governed.

Likewise the shepherds of the soul may be divided into two classes: those who feed the souls of the living with the word of God, such as prelates, priests, and preachers, to whose custody are committed the frail souls of those who

are subject to the government ordained for each one; and secondly, those of an excellent learning who, either by reading what men in the past have written, or by writing what seems to them to have been omitted or not very clearly explained, inform the minds and souls of hearers and readers. This latter class are generally called doctors, in whatever faculty it may be. This kind of shepherd our poet immediately, or in a short time, became.

To verify this let us pass over his other works, and observe his *Commedia,* which by the beauty and agreeableness of its text feeds not only men, but women and children as well, while by the admirable sweetness of the profound meaning therein concealed it refreshes and nourishes great intellects, after it has for a while held them in suspense. His endeavor to acquire the leaves of the tree whose fruit had fed him signifies naught else save his ardent desire for the laurel crown, which was touched on above, for the one cause of this desire is that the leaves may bear witness to the fruit. His mother says that while he was most ardently longing for the leaves she saw him fall, this falling being none other than that which all of us make without rising, namely, the act of dying. This, if we well recall what was said above, we shall find to have occurred while he was most desirous of his laureation.

Continuing, his mother says that she saw him suddenly change from a shepherd into a peacock. By this transformation we may easily understand his posthumous fame, which, though it rests upon his other works, lives especially through his *Commedia.* This book, according to my judgment, is in perfect conformity with the peacock, if the properties of each are observed. The peacock, it appears, has four notable characteristics. The first is his angelic plumage, whereon are a hundred eyes. The second is his foul feet and noiseless step. The third is his voice, horrible to hear. The fourth and last is his fragrant and incorruptible flesh. The *Commedia* of our poet also fully possesses these four attributes. But inasmuch as the given

order cannot fittingly be followed, I will proceed to adapt now one, now another, as they come most to my purpose, beginning with the last.

I say that the sense of our *Commedia* is like the flesh of the peacock, for, whether you call its sense moral or theological, it is, in whatever part of the book most pleases you, simple and immutable truth, and as such not only cannot receive corruption, but, the more it is examined, the greater odor of its incorruptible sweetness does it bring to those who perceive it. Of this many examples might easily be given, if the present subject permitted. I shall not advance any, but leave the search thereof to men of understanding.

Angelic plumage covers his flesh. I say angelic, not because I know that angels have such plumage; but, hearing that angels fly, I reason as a mortal that they must have feathers. And since I do not know of any plumage so rare and beautiful as the plumage of the peacock, I imagine their plumage to resemble his. Now I do not name the plumage of the angels from that of the peacock, but the peacock's plumage from that of the angels, for the angel is a nobler bird than the peacock. By the feathers wherewith his body is covered I understand the beauty of the rare narrative, seen in the letter and on the surface of the *Commedia.* Witness the descent into Hell; the sight of the place; its character and the various conditions of its inhabitants; the ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory, together with the tears and laments of those who aspire to be holy; and finally the ascent into Paradise and the vision of the ineffable glory of the blessed—a story so beautiful and rare that no man ever imagined or heard one more so. It is divided into a hundred cantos, even as the peacock is said to have a hundred eyes on its tail. These cantos distinguish the fitting varieties of the work, even as the eyes distinguish the colors and diversity of the things presented to them. It is clear, therefore, that the flesh of our peacock is covered with angelic plumage.

Similarly the feet of the peacock are foul, and his step soft, which things perfectly correspond with the *Commedia* of our author. For even as it is clear that the whole body is sustained by the feet, so *prima facie* it appears that every written work is sustained by its manner of expression. And the vulgar tongue, by which and on which every joint of this poem is upheld, is foul in comparison with the lofty, masterful style used by every other poet, although it is more beautiful than other styles, and is conformable to our present ways of thinking. The soft tread of the peacock signifies the humility of the style. This is demanded in comedies, as is known to those who understand what comedy means.

Finally, I note that the voice of the peacock is horrible, and this, although at first blush there seems great sweetness in the words of our poet, is perfectly in accord therewith, if we will closely observe the inner marrow. Who cries out more horribly than he, when in the bitterest fiction he censures the faults of many who are living, and chastises those of the dead? What voice is more terrible than that of the chastiser to him who is inclined to sin? Certainly none. By his demonstrations he in the same breath terrifies the good and casts down the wicked. Therefore, as far as this point concerns us, he truly may be said to have a horrible voice. For this reason and for the others touched on above, it is sufficiently clear why he, who, when alive, was a shepherd, after his death became a peacock; even as we may believe it to have been revealed by divine inspiration to his dear mother in her sleep.

I know that I have made this explanation of the dream of our poet's mother very superficially; and this for many reasons. In the first place, because I may not possess the ability required for such a task. Secondly, assuming that I had the ability, my main theme would not permit it. And finally, even if I had the ability, and the subject had suffered it, I should have done well not to say more than has been said, in order that something should be left for him who has

greater ability than I, and greater desire. So now that I have spoken as much as is sufficient and proper for me, let whatever is lacking be left to the care of him who follows.

My little bark is come to the port whither it directed its prow on leaving the opposite shore. Although its voyage has been short, and the sea it has ploughed tranquil and not deep, none the less, since it has come without hindrance, thanks are due to Him who has lent a fair wind to its sails, to whom with all the humility, all the devotion, all the affection that I can command, I render not such thanks as are fitting, but such as I can give, blessing his name and his might for ever and ever.

THE LIFE OF DANTE

BY

LIONARDO BRUNI ARETINO

(1369–1444)

I

PROEM

Having recently completed a work of great length, I was desirous to read something in the vulgar tongue to refresh my toil-spent mind, since too much sameness palls in study as in food. As I looked about with this purpose in view, there came to my hands a short work by Boccaccio, entitled: *Of the Life, Habits, and Studies of the Famous Poet Dante.* Although I had previously read this work with great diligence, yet on the present examination thereof I felt that our gentle and sweet Boccaccio had written the life and habits of that sublime poet as though he were writing the *Filocolo,* the *Filostrato,* or the *Fiammetta.* For it is filled with love and sighs and burning tears, as though man were born into this world for no other purpose save to find himself in those ten amorous Days, wherein enamored ladies and gallant youths recount the *Hundred Tales.* And Boccaccio is so absorbed by the love parts that he takes no notice of the serious and substantial portions of Dante's career, recording trivialities and omitting things of moment. I purpose, therefore, to write for my diversion a new life of Dante, paying greater attention to the significant events. I do this, not in disparagement of Boccaccio, but that I may compose a supplement to his work.

II

THE LIFE OF DANTE

Dante's ancestors belonged to one of the oldest Florentine families. Indeed the poet in certain passages seems to imply that they were among those Romans who founded Florence. But this is most doubtful—mere supposition, as it seems to me. His great-great-grandfather, as I am informed, was Messer Cacciaguida, a Florentine knight who served under the Emperor Conrad. This Messer Cacciaguida had two brothers, Moronto and Eliseo. We do not read of any succession from Moronto, but from Eliseo sprang the family of the Elisei, who, however, possibly bore this name previously. From Messer Cacciaguida came the Aldighieri, so called from one of his sons, who received the name from the family of his mother.

Messer Cacciaguida, his brothers, and their ancestors, lived almost at the corner of the Porta San Piero, where it is first entered from the Mercato Vecchio, in houses still called of the Elisei, since their ancient title has remained to them. The Aldighieri, who were descended from Messer Cacciaguida, dwelt in the piazza at the rear of San Martino del Vescovo, opposite the street that leads to the houses of the Sacchetti. On the other side their dwellings extend toward those of the Donati and of the Giuochi.

Dante was born in the year of our Lord 1265, shortly after the return to Florence of the Guelfs, who had been in exile because of the defeat at Montaperti. In his boyhood he received a liberal education under teachers of letters, and at once gave evidence of a great natural capacity equal to excellent things. At this time he lost his father, but, encouraged by his relatives and by Brunetto Latini, a most worthy man for those times, he devoted himself not only

to literature but to other liberal studies, omitting nothing that pertains to the making of an excellent man.

He did not, however, renounce the world and shut himself up to ease, but associated and conversed with youths of his own age. Courteous, spirited, and full of courage, he took part in every youthful exercise; and in the great and memorable battle of Campaldino, Dante, young but well esteemed, fought vigorously, mounted and in the front rank. Here he incurred the utmost peril, for the first engagement was between the cavalry, in which the horse of the Aretines defeated and overthrew with such violence the horse of the Florentines that the latter, repulsed and routed, were obliged to fall back upon their infantry.

This rout, however, lost the battle for the Aretines. For their victorious horsemen, pursuing those who fled, left their infantry far behind, so that thenceforth they nowhere fought in unison, but the cavalry fought alone without the infantry, and the infantry alone without the cavalry. But on the Florentine side the contrary took place, for, since their cavalry had retreated to their infantry, they were able to advance in a body, and easily overthrew first the horse and then the foot-soldiers of the enemy.

Dante gives a description of the battle in one of his letters. He states that he was in the fight, and draws a plan of the field. And for our better information we must understand that the Uberti, Lamberti, Abati, and all the other Florentine exiles sided with the Aretines in this battle, and that all the exiles of Arezzo, nobles and commoners of the Guelfs, all of whom were in banishment at this time, fought with the Florentines. For this reason the words in the Palace read: *The Ghibellines defeated at Certomondo,* and not, *The Aretines defeated;* to the end that those Aretines who shared the victory with the Commune might have no reason to complain.

Returning then to our subject, I repeat that Dante fought valiantly for his country on this occasion. And I could wish that our Boccaccio had made mention of this virtue

rather than of love at nine, and the like trivialities which he tells of this great man. But what use is there in speaking? 'The tongue points where the tooth pains,' and 'Whose taste runs to drinking, his talk runs to wines.'

When Dante returned home from this battle, he devoted himself more fervently than ever to his studies, yet omitted naught of polite and social intercourse. It was remarkable that, although he studied incessantly, none would have supposed from his happy manner and youthful way of speaking that he studied at all. In view of this, I wish to denounce the false opinion of many ignorant persons who think that no one is a student save he who buries himself in solitude and ease. I have never seen one of these muffled recluses who knew three letters. The great and lofty genius has no need of such tortures. Indeed, it is a most true and absolute conclusion that they who do not learn quickly, never learn. Therefore to estrange and absent one's self from society is peculiar to those whose poor minds unfit them for knowledge of any kind.

It was not only in social intercourse with men that Dante moved, since in his youth he took to himself a wife. She was a lady of the Donati family, called Madonna Gemma. By her he had several children, as we shall see in another part of this work. At this point Boccaccio loses all patience, and says that wives are hindrances to study, forgetting that Socrates, the noblest philosopher that ever lived, had a wife and children, and held public offices in his city. And Aristotle, beyond whose wisdom and learning it is impossible to go, was twice married, and had children and great riches. Moreover, Cicero, Varro, and Seneca, all consummate Latin philosophers, had wives, and held offices of government in the republic. So Boccaccio may pardon me, for his judgments on this matter are both false and feeble. Man, according to all the philosophers, is a social animal. The first union, by the multiplication whereof the city arises, is that of husband and wife. Nothing can be perfect where this does not obtain, for only this kind of love is natural, lawful, and allowable.

Dante, then, took a wife, and living the honest, studious life of a citizen, was considerably employed in the republic, and at length, when he had attained to the required age, was made one of the Priors, not chosen by lot as at present, but elected by vote, as was then the rule. With him in this office were Messer Palmieri degli Altoviti, Neri di Messer Jacopo degli Alberti, and others.

This priorate, of the year 1300, was the cause of Dante's banishment and of all the misfortunes of his life, as he himself states in one of his letters in the following words: 'All my troubles and hardships had their cause and rise in the disastrous meetings held during my priorate. Albeit in wisdom I was not worthy of that office, nevertheless I was not unworthy of it in fidelity and in age, since ten years had elapsed since the battle of Campaldino, wherein the Ghibelline party was almost utterly defeated and effaced, and on that occasion I was present, no child at arms, and felt at first great fear, but in the end the greatest joy by reason of the various fortunes of that battle.' These are Dante's own words. I wish now to give in detail the cause of his banishment, since it is a matter worthy our attention, and Boccaccio passes over it so briefly that perchance it was not so well known to him as it is to me by reason of the history I have written.

The city of Florence, which formerly had been divided by the many dissensions of Guelfs and Ghibellines, finally passed into the hands of the Guelfs, and remained for a long period in that condition. But now among the Guelfs themselves, who ruled the republic, another curse of parties arose, namely, the factions of the Bianchi and Neri. This infection first appeared among the Pistojans, particularly in the family of the Cancellieri. And when all Pistoja was divided, the Florentines, by way of remedy, ordered the leaders of these factions to come to Florence, in order that they might not cause further disturbance at home.

This remedy worked less good to the Pistojans by the removal of their chiefs than harm to the Florentines, who

contracted this pestilence. For, since the leaders had many relatives and friends in Florence, from whom they received divers favors, they at once kindled a greater fire of discord than they had left behind them in Pistoja. And inasmuch as the affair was treated of *publice et privatim,* the evil seed spread to a marvelous degree, so that the whole city took sides. There was scarcely a house, noble or plebeian, that was not divided against itself, nor was there a man of any prominence or family that did not subscribe to one of these two parties. The division extended even to brothers of the same blood, one holding to this side, the other to that.

The troubles, which already had lasted several months, were multiplied not only by words, but by mean and spiteful deeds. These were begun by the youths, but were taken up by men of maturity, until the whole city was in confusion and suspense. At this point, while Dante was still of the Priors, the Neri faction held a meeting in the Church of Santa Trinità. The proceedings were profoundly secret, but the main plan was to treat with Boniface VIII, who was pope at that time, to the end that he should send Charles of Valois, of the royal house of France, to pacify and reform the city.

When the other faction, the Bianchi, heard about the conference, they immediately conceived the greatest distrust thereof. They took up arms, gathered together their allies, and, marching to the Priors, complained of the conference in that it had deliberated in private on public affairs. This was done, they declared, in order to banish them, the Bianchi, from Florence, and they therefore demanded that the Priors should punish this presumptuous outrage.

They who had held the meeting, fearing, in turn, the Bianchi, took up arms, complained to the Priors that their adversaries had armed and fortified themselves without the public consent, and affirmed that the Bianchi under various pretexts wished to banish them. They asked the Priors to punish them, therefore, as disturbers of the public peace.

Both parties were provided with armed men and with

their allies. Suspicion and terror were at their height, and the actual peril was very great. The city being in arms and in a turmoil, the Priors, at Dante's suggestion, took the precaution of fortifying themselves behind the multitude of the people. And when they were thus secured, they confined within bounds the leaders of the two factions. Of the Neri faction, Messer Corso Donati, Messer Geri Spini, Messer Giacchinotto de' Pazzi, Messer Rosso della Tosa, and others, were sent to the Castello della Pieve in the province of Perugia. Of the Bianchi faction were Messer Gentile and Messer Torrigiano de' Cerchi, Guido Cavalcanti, Baschiera della Tosa, Baldinaccio Adimari, Naldo di Messer Lottino Gherardini, and others. These men were confined within bounds at Serezzana.

This action caused much trouble to Dante. Although he defended himself as a man without a party, yet it was thought that he inclined to the Bianchi, and that he disapproved of the scheme proposed in Santa Trinità of calling Charles of Valois to Florence, believing that it was likely to bring discord and calamity on the city. To add to this ill-feeling, those citizens who were confined at Serezzana suddenly returned to Florence, while those who had been sent to the Castello della Pieve remained outside. With regard to this matter Dante explained that he was not a prior at the time when the men of Serezzana were recalled, and that therefore he was not to be held accountable. He declared, furthermore, that their return was due to the sickness and death of Guido Cavalcanti, who had fallen ill at Serezzana owing to the bad climate, and died shortly afterward.

This unequal state of things led the Pope to send Charles to Florence. Being honorably received into the city out of respect to the papacy and the house of France, he straightway recalled those citizens who were still confined within bounds, and later banished all the Bianchi faction. The reason of this was a plot that was disclosed by his baron, Messer Piero Ferranti. This man said that three gentlemen of the Bianchi party, namely, Naldo di Messer Lottino

Gherardini, Baschiera della Tosa, and Baldinaccio Adimari, had requested him to try and prevail upon Charles of Valois to keep their party at the head of the State, and that they promised to make him Governor of Prato in return. The baron produced the written petition and promise with their seals affixed. This original document I have seen, since it lies to-day in the Palace with other public writings, but in my opinion it is not above suspicion, and indeed I feel quite certain that it was forged. Be that as it may, the banishment of all the Bianchi party followed, Charles professing great indignation at their request and promise.

Dante was not in Florence at this time, but at Rome, whither he had been sent shortly before as ambassador to the Pope, to offer him the peace and concord of the citizens. Nevertheless, through the anger of those Neri who had been banished during his priorate, his house was attacked, everything was pillaged, and his estate was laid waste. Banishment was decreed for him and for Messer Palmieri Altoviti, not by reason of any wrong committed, but for contumacy in failing to appear.

The manner of decreeing the banishment was this. They enacted a perverse and iniquitous law with retrospective action, which declared it the power and duty of the Podestà of Florence to recognize past offenses committed by a prior when in office, although acquittal had followed at the time. Under this law Messer Cante de' Gabbrielli, Podestà of Florence, summoned Dante to trial. And since he was absent from the city, and did not appear, he was condemned and banished, and his goods were confiscated, although they already had been plundered and laid waste.

We have given the cause and the circumstances of Dante's banishment; we shall now speak of his life in exile. When Dante heard of his ruin, he at once left Rome, where he was ambassador, and, journeying with all haste, he came to Siena. Here he learned more definitely of his misfortune, and seeing no recourse, he decided to throw in his lot with the other exiles. He first joined them in a meeting held

at Gorgonza, where among the many things discussed they fixed on Arezzo as their headquarters. There they made a large camp, and created the Count Alessandro da Romena their captain, together with twelve councilors, among whom was Dante. They remained here from hope to hope till the year 1304, and then, making a great gathering of all their allies, they planned to re-enter Florence with an exceeding great multitude, assembled not only from Arezzo, but from Bologna and Pistoja. Arriving unexpectedly, they immediately captured one of the gates and occupied part of the city. But in the end they were forced to retire with no advantage.

Since this great hope had failed, Dante, deeming it wrong to waste more time, left Arezzo for Verona. Here he was most courteously received by the Lords della Scala, and tarried with them for some time. And now in all humility he endeavored by good deeds and upright conduct to obtain the favor of returning to Florence through the voluntary action of the government. Devoting himself resolutely to this end, he wrote frequently to individual citizens in power and also to the people, among others one long letter which began: *Popule mee, quid feci tibi?*

But while he was still hoping to return by the way of pardon, the election of Henry of Luxemburg as Emperor occurred. This election, and the coming of Henry, filled all Italy with the hope of a great change, and Dante himself could no longer keep to his plan of waiting for pardon. With his pride of spirit aroused, he began to speak evil of the rulers of the State, calling them caitiffs and criminals, and threatening them at the hands of the Emperor with deserved punishment. From this, he said, there was clearly no possible escape for them.

Yet so great was the reverence he felt for his country, that when the Emperor had marched against Florence and was encamped near the gate, Dante would not be present, as he writes, although he had urged the Emperor's coming. And when Henry died the following summer at Buoncon-

vento, Dante lost all hope, for he himself had destroyed all chance of pardon by speaking and writing against the citizens in power, and no force remained whereon he could place further assurance. Void of hope, therefore, and in great poverty, he passed the remainder of his life tarrying in divers parts of Lombardy, Tuscany, and Romagna, under the protection of various lords, until finally he settled down at Ravenna, where he died.

Since we have told of his public troubles, and under this head have shown the course of his life, we will now speak of his domestic affairs, and of his habits and studies. Previous to his banishment from Florence, although he was not a man of great wealth, yet he was not poor, for he possessed a moderate patrimony, large enough to admit of comfortable living. He had one brother, Francisco Alighieri, a wife, as already mentioned, and several children, whose descendants remain to this day, as we shall show later. He owned good houses in Florence, adjoining those of Gieri di Messer Bello, his kinsman; possessions also in Camerata, in the Piacentina, and in the plain of Ripoli; and, as he writes, many pieces of valuable furniture.

He was a man of great refinement; of medium height, and of a pleasant but deeply serious face. He spoke only seldom, and then slowly, but was very subtle in his replies. His portrait may be seen in Santa Croce, near the centre of the church, on the left hand as you approach the high altar, a most faithful painting by an excellent artist of that time. He delighted in music and singing, and drew exceedingly well. He wrote a finished hand, making thin, long, and perfectly formed letters, as I have seen in some of his correspondence. In his youth he associated with young lovers, and he, too, was filled with a like passion, not through evil desire, but out of the gentleness of his heart. And in his tender years he began to write love verses, as may be seen in his short work in the vernacular called the *Vita Nuova.*

His chief study was poetry: not dry, poor, or fantastic poetry, but such as is impregnated, enriched, and confirmed

by true knowledge and many disciplines. For the better understanding of the reader, I say that one becomes a poet in one of two ways. The first is through his own genius, excited and aroused by some inward and hidden force, termed frenzy and possession (*occupazione*) of the soul. To give an illustration of what I mean—the Blessed Francis, not through knowledge or scholarly discipline, but by possession and abstraction of mind, applied his soul so intensely to God, that he became as it were transfigured beyond human sense, and knew more of God than do the theologians through study and letters. So in poetry, one becomes a poet through an inner excitement, and through a certain application of the mind. This is the highest and most perfect kind of poetry; whence some say that poets are divine, others call them sacred, and others prophets, by reason of this abstraction and the frenzy whereof I speak. We have examples of this kind of poet in Orpheus and Hesiod. Orpheus had such power that stones and forests moved to the sound of his lyre. And Hesiod, though a rude, untaught shepherd, by merely drinking of the waters of the Castalian fountain, without any study whatsoever, became a supreme poet. We possess his works to-day, and they are of such sort that no lettered or scholarly poet surpasses them.

One class, then, is formed of those who become poets through an inner abstraction of the soul. The other class create their poetry by means of knowledge and study, by discipline, art, and forethought. Of this second sort was Dante. For it was by the study of philosophy, theology, astrology, arithmetic, and geometry, the reading of history, the meditation on many and various books, and by watching and fatigue in his studies, that he acquired the knowledge which he was to adorn and unfold in his poetry.

Since we have spoken of the nature, we will now speak of the name of poetry, in which is comprehended the substance. Albeit these are difficult matters to express in the vulgar idiom, nevertheless I will undertake their explanation, because our modern poets have not, in my opinion, clearly

understood them; nor is it surprising, seeing that they are ignorant of the Greek tongue.

I say, then, that this name *poeta* is a Greek word, meaning maker. I know that I should not be understood if I stopped here, so there is need to explain my statement more at length. Consider books, and works of poetry. Some men are readers of the work of others, and originate nothing themselves; this is the case with most people. Others are the makers of these works: as Virgil, for example, made the *Æneid,* Statius the *Thebaid,* Ovid the *Metamorphoses,* and Homer the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* These men who made the works were poets, that is makers, of these works which we others read. We, then, are the readers, and they were the makers. When we hear a man praised for his learning or for his letters, do we not ask, 'Is he producing anything? Will he leave behind any work of his own making?'

A poet, then, is the maker of any work. Some one may say that, according to this statement, the merchant who makes up a book of accounts is a poet, and that Livy and Sallust were poets, for each of them wrote books, and made works for perusal. To this I reply that one does not speak of making poetic works, unless they be in verse. Now verse results from excellence of style, for syllables, measure, and sound pertain to poetry alone. We are in the habit of saying in our vernacular, 'This person makes songs and sonnets;' but if he wrote a letter to a friend, we should not say that he had made a work. The name of poet connotes an excellent and admirable style in verse, veiled and adorned with gracefulness and with high imagination. But even as every presiding officer commands and governs, yet only he is emperor who is the head of all, so among those who compose works in verse, only he who is supremely excellent therein is called a poet.

This is the real and absolute truth as to the name and office of poet. Whether the composition be in the vulgar or the literary style is of no importance, nor is there any difference save as between writing in Greek and writing in Latin.

Every tongue has its own perfection, its own music, and its own polished and artistic utterance. But if I were asked why Dante elected to write in the vulgar tongue rather than in Latin and the literary style, I should give the true answer that Dante knew he was far better fitted for this riming style in the vernacular than for the Latin or literary style. And certainly he has gracefully expressed in vernacular rime many things which he had neither the knowledge nor the power to set forth in the Latin tongue and in heroic verse. The proof lies in his eclogues, written in hexameters, which, good though they be, I have often seen surpassed. For the truth is that our poet's strength lay in vernacular rime, wherein he has no peer. But in Latin verse and in prose he barely reached mediocrity. The reason of this is that his own age was given up to the writing of rime, but of prose as a fine art or of Latin verse, men of that period knew nothing, being rude, uncultivated, and without literary skill; taught in these disciplines, to be sure, but after the manner of monks and scholastics.

Dante writes that riming began about one hundred and fifty years before his time. The first in Italy to practice it were Guido Guinizzelli of Bologna, the 'Joyous Knight' Guitone d'Arezzo, Bonagiunta da Lucca, and Guido da Messina [Guido delle Colonne]. Dante so far excelled all of these in knowledge, delicacy, and graceful elegance that good judges believe that in the use of rime he will never be surpassed. And truly wonderful is the sweetness and sublimity of his wise, pithy, and serious verse, with its variety and affluence, its knowledge of philosophy, its references to ancient history, and such familiarity with modern history that he seems to have been present at every event. These excellent qualities, unfolded with the gentleness of rime, take captive the mind of every reader, and especially of such as have the greatest understanding.

His invention, which was marvelous, was laid hold of with great genius, comprehending, as it does, description of the world, the heavens and the planets, of men, the rewards

and punishments of human life, happiness and misery, and the middle way that lies between these two extremes. I believe that there never was any one who took a larger or more fertile subject by which to deliver the mind of all its conceptions through the different spirits who discourse on diverse causes of things, on different countries, and on the various chances of fortune.

Dante began this, his chief work, before his expulsion, and completed it afterwards in exile, as the work itself clearly reveals. He also wrote moral canzoni and sonnets. His canzoni are perfect, polished, graceful, and full of high sentiment. All of them begin in noble fashion, like the one that commences:

> O Love that drawest from the Heaven thy power
> Even as the sun his splendor,

wherein there is a subtle philosophical comparison between the effects of the sun and the effects of love. Another begins:

> Three Ladies round about my heart have come.

Still another begins:

> Ye Ladies that have cognizance of Love.

And in many other canzoni he is equally subtle, scholarly, and polished. In his sonnets he does not show the same power.

So much for his works in the vernacular; but he also wrote in Latin prose and verse: in prose, a book entitled the *De Monarchia,* written in unadorned fashion, with no beauty of style; also a book entitled *De Vulgari Eloquentia,* and many letters. In Latin verse he wrote several eclogues, and the beginning of the *Commedia* in hexameters, but, as he did not succeed with the style, he pursued it no further.

Dante died at Ravenna in the year 1321. He left, among others, one son by name Piero, who studied law and showed himself a man of ability. Thanks to his own powers and to

the remembrance in which his father was held, he attained to great distinction and wealth, and maintained his position at Verona with considerable state. This Messer Piero had a son named Dante, who in turn had a son Lionardo, who is still living and has several children. A short time ago Lionardo came to Florence with other young men of Verona, well and honorably appointed, and visited me as a friend to the memory of his great-grandfather, Dante. I showed him the houses of the poet and of his ancestors, and called his attention to many things that were new to him because he and his family had been estranged from their fatherland. And thus Fortune turns this world, and shifts its inhabitants with the revolutions of her wheel.

A PASSAGE

FROM

THE LIFE OF DANTE

BY

FILIPPO VILLANI

(before 1348 — ca. 1404)

THE EMBASSY TO VENICE

It came to pass that the Venetians, confident in their strength and power, unjustly declared war on Guido [the Lord of Ravenna], and gathering together their forces on land and sea, proudly made ready for his overthrow. This affair hastened the death of the poet; for death, in truth, visits even the illustrious. Since Guido was occupied by this great crisis in his affairs, and placed little confidence in his own powers, he deemed that the name and eloquence of Dante would be able to turn aside the impending ruin. He assigned to him, therefore, in the capacity of envoy, the duty of seeking peace.

The poet gladly accepted the charge, and after he had overcome the many obstacles that were laid in his way, arrived, with some solicitude, at Venice. But the Venetians, who were little trained in eloquence, feared the man, lest they should be shaken in their proud purpose by his persuasiveness, wherein the poet, as they had learned, was exceedingly effective. Though Dante begged again and again that he might announce his mission, they refused to give him audience. And when the poet, being denied a hearing, petitioned for carriage back to Ravenna by sea, since he was afflicted with fever, they, laboring under still greater folly, utterly refused his request.

It seems that the Venetians had granted to the admiral of their naval force the full powers of peace and war, and feared that, if they allowed Dante a safe return by sea, he of himself would be able to turn the admiral whither he wished. Surely on this illustrious city the shame of its mad folly will rest for ever, for it is manifest

that this great republic was laboring under the veriest fickleness, in that she feared lest his persuasiveness should move her from that course whereon she had deliberately decided; and, what is baser still, in that she wished to banish eloquence from her city. With great inconvenience the poet, therefore, though ill with fever, made the journey to Ravenna by land, where, a few days after his arrival, he died, and was honored with a public funeral.

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